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VISIONS

COUNT TOLSTOY

Clayton

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I WAS OVERWHELMED BY THE SUFFOCATING ODOR OF INCENSE.

VISIONS

Tales from the Russian

Tolstoĭ, I. L.

BY

COUNT ILYA TOLSTOY
Author of "Reminiscences of Tolstoy"

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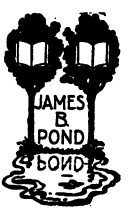
Ossip Perelma



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PREFACE

The stories in this volume have been translated by different people. "A War Vision" was translated by William Ressnick; "An Affair of Honor" and "Too Late," by Elbert Aidline; "Without a Nose" and "The Little Green Stick," by Nicholas Aleinikoff and "The Scarlet Bashlyks," by Miss Rojansky. Thanks is due to Louis Weinberg for assistance in editing the translations.

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STORIES OF THE WAR

THE LITTLE NURSE

THE LITTLE NURSE

It had been an arduous day. Two operations took place in the morning, and toward the evening, just before supper time, there came on wagons, direct from the battlefield, twenty-eight more seriously wounded.

The hospital was, as usual, over-crowded; the doctor cried out that he had no room for more patients. "All cots are taken." However, to refuse them shelter would mean to expose the wounded over night to the mercy of the rain, and so they were finally taken in, washed, dressed with clean white bandages and put for the night in the "assorting" room, upon new linen mattresses thickly stuffed with fresh, sweetly smelling hay.

When everything had been arranged and the nurses gathered for their evening meal, the wounded wanted to eat, for they had had nothing in their mouths for over twenty-four hours.

The nurses ran to the kitchen, gathered up everything that was there and handed to each patient a cutlet and a piece of stale brown bread. They themselves remained hungry, and as-

sembling in their rooms satisfied their appetites with chocolate and tea biscuits.

Chocolate with sisters of mercy stands for everything. One cannot imagine what a nurse would do if there were no chocolate in the world. When about to make a journey, she will never think of other provisions; she puts a bar of chocolate into her valise and considers herself fully supplied for several days. If seized with a sudden pang of hunger during relaxation from her labors, she will break off a piece of chocolate and eat it. Before going to sleep, tired, undressed, and unwashed, she will stoop down, draw out from under her bed her basket, and take a bit of chocolate, and so falls asleep with a pleasant taste in her mouth, contented and happy.

Far be it from me, dear, pathetic toilers to make sport of your efforts. I recall with affection, that little brown morsel in your clean, tender hands. To me that bit is the symbol of your spirit of self-sacrifice, of your boundless patience and love. I saw your work at the front and I take my hat off to you.

The watch nurse for the night was Miss Zavialova, "Little Vera," as she was called by her companions.

Before the war she had simply been a young lady who lived with her parents on their estate.

Like all the young ladies of that period, she too, had been raving about Artzibashev's novels, swallowed Sergius Gorodetsky, adored Balmont and wore a silken shawl of "tango"? color. As soon as she learned that the war had broken out she left the city, almost against the will of her parents, entered a training school, finished her course and enrolled as a civil nurse in the hospital erected at the expense of the local merchants. There she had stayed ever since.

At first it was not easy for her to grow used to her new life. While at college she had been present at one serious operation, the amputation of a leg. She nearly fainted. She was growing pale and commenced to waver, when some one caught her arm; and this touch was enough to make her remember in time that she must not display any weakness. She braced up, and even went quite close to the operating table.

The surgeon just then lopped off the leg and threw it into the washtub. The cold water splashed upon her apron and sprayed her face, and she had to leave the room to go and wash herself. She did not come back. For a whole hour she sat in the hallway and wept.

She later saw other operations, more terri-

ble still, but she could never forget that white leg with the big, crooked, dirty nails.

Another vivid impression was engraved on her memory, that of a transport of wounded which she received in Kieff, at the freight depot, where a temporary feeding place had been established. Some crawled out of the cars unaided—lame, with arms in slings, heads bandaged. The more seriously wounded were taken out from the railway cars on stretchers, and were carried into the large, long warehouse, where they were emptied onto the straw covered floor. In one of the warehouses there were Russians, in the other Austrians.

Little Vera brought them hot tea and gruel. While attending them, the thought came to her how dreadfully strange it was that these people should mutilate and cut up each other on purpose.

Later when she got into the rut and became a professional, these thoughts ceased to agitate her mind. In her work she forgot to think, her nerves grew strong and her only anxiety was to do her duty in the best and quickest way so as to most ably serve the patients. Only occasionally, at night, when sleep would not come, was she gripped by the horror of human suffering, and then she would pass long wakeful vigils,

with eyes wide open staring into space, while her heart wept and prayed.

So it happened with her this night.

She said good night to her companions, washed herself quickly, put on her soft felt slippers and, ascending the broad gravel stairs with noiseless step and gnawing heart, entered into the dimly lighted sick room. It smelled of drugs and human flesh. Many of the seriously wounded were still awake. On one of the cots, by the wall, there loomed the white figure of a wounded Austrian with a bandaged head, who rocked rhythmically to and fro on one place—like a bear in a cage, Vera thought.

He was one of the wounded whose days were numbered. A few days ago his skull had been opened and a splinter extracted from his brain, and now serious inflammation was developing.

Already he had lost all sense of reality. Last night he could still be spoken to, moved, bandaged. But now, he permitted no one to approach him, and kept on screaming loudly and despairingly: "Ah . . . ah," as if he were being beaten or stabbed.

"If only not to-night," thought little Vera, casting a side glance at him and listening to his cries.

Several men asked her for water; for some she herself lit cigarettes and put them into their mouths (she did that only at night, without the physician's knowledge), adjusted the pillows under others, and so finally came to the door which opened into a small room where lay the only officer in the hospital, Ensign Nelidov.

This officer, the favorite of the whole hospital, had lain there for a long time and was in a dangerous condition. He had been wounded in the leg in a battle during the retreat of the Russians and was found unconscious by an Austrian reconnoitering detachment.

To evade being taken prisoner, Nelidov feigned death. But the Austrian officer bent over him, saw that he was still alive and began to fire at him from his revolver. After the third bullet Nelidov still retained sufficient strength to rise and, putting his hand to his temple, remarked "Schiessen sie hier" (shoot here). Then the Austrian gave him a parting shot and went off without looking around.

Nelidov was not picked up by our forces until the following day. When brought to the hospital riddled with bullets, no one imagined he could live.

Although he was better now, his condition was very critical, for his temperature rose every

day without visible cause and there was danger of blood poisoning. It was especially bad that he grew nervous, excited, and continually jumped up and would not lie quiet. He said he was in good health and would presently leave the hospital and go back to war.

Of course, no one told him of the danger of his condition. The physicians and the nurses exerted all their efforts to keep him quiet. For that reason when he could not often sleep of nights he was given small doses of morphine.

When little Vera opened the door into his room she saw Nelidov sitting in his bed and smoking.

"Why don't you go to sleep? You know it harms you to be awake. I will give you an injection if you want it."

"Come in; come in, Vera Pavlovna. I don't want to sleep. I knew you'd keep watch to-night and I have been waiting for you. Only, for God's sake, no medicine! I do not want to sleep. I slept during the day. My only desire is that you will be with me. Do not go away."

"Will you promise to sleep then, yes?"

"Yes, yes, I promise. Come here; sit down near me; say something. I love your voice so much. It is so soft and sympathetic."

"Did your leg hurt you to-day?" inquired

Vera, while seating herself on the chair by the small white wooden table.

"No, don't speak of my leg; it is not necessary. It is entirely uninteresting. Tell me something of yourself. How pale you are to-night. . . . What an interesting face you have! How well your uniform becomes you! I get so used to seeing you in this attire that I cannot picture you in ordinary garb, with uncovered hair. I often want to imagine how you looked when quite young. Do tell me, where did you live before the war; who are you; what are you? I want to know everything."

"Why, that is not interesting."

"Why uninteresting? Perhaps after the war, if I remain alive, if I come out unscathed, —perhaps, then I will seek you out; maybe you will permit me to hope. . . ."

"One must not think of what shall happen later. Just the same, you will forget me; besides, that is not important."

"What, unimportant? If that be not important, what is important?"

"Well, the important thing now is that you speedily recover, and you don't want to listen and you do need sleep."

"I will not sleep. Do you really believe that I am in the least concerned about this silly

thing, my health, my sleep? Can't you understand that the fact that you sit here near me, in my room, so close to me, that I gaze at you and hear your voice—don't you know that this is dearer to me than everything else in the world? My dear Vera Pavlovna, I don't know what has happened to me to-day; forgive me! You know I have been silent all this time, have not said a word to you. But now I can't keep quiet; I must speak."

"There, you must not talk, dear. Lie down; let me take your temperature."

"Again temperature!"

"Certainly. If you remain obdurate, I shall get angry and go. Lie down; I will cover you up, and put in the thermometer."

"You are not angry now, are you?"

"No. If you will only listen to me."

Vera took the thermometer from the table, shook it, looked at the mercury and, unbuttoning the collar of his shirt, started, with trained hand, to adjust the instrument.

"Let me; I can do it myself."

"Well, all right, do it yourself," said little Vera in the tone of one appeasing a capricious child. She walked up to the head of his bed and straightened his pillow.

Nelidov glanced over his head, caught her

hand and covered it with passionate, burning kisses.

"Oh, my darling, forgive me! You are not angry?"

"Let go, dear; you must sleep. What a queer person you are; just like a child, indeed!"

"Kiss me, then, on the forehead as you would a child; kiss me. No harm in it for you, while I . . . I shall be happy."

"And you will sleep?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go?"

"Yes."

Vera bent softly and guardedly touched his forehead with a dry, child's kiss. How hot and moist his head felt on her lips!

"I will return shortly to see the thermometer. I must be going now," she said, making an effort to remain composed. With an even, silent tread she started out.

"You will come back?"

"Yes."

The big Austrian was still sitting and rocking.

"Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . ."

The air grew close. The men fell asleep and it was uncanny to hear the screams of the dying

Austrian amidst the measured, even-tempered snoring of the armless, legless and shot-riddled sufferers reposing in forgetful slumber. As if they did not feel that right here, near them, a man was dying. The moans grew slower and weaker.

A sudden, wild, insane shrill and then calmer, lower . . .

"Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . ."

Little Vera sat down under the lamp and took out her watch. In ten minutes she must go to Nelidov and see his temperature.

"Of course, he has fever heat. Otherwise he could not have talked such things, would not have kissed my hand. Why did he do it?" she said to herself. "At such moments, when there is so much suffering about, when death hovers in the air,—can one talk of love?" Then, as if in deciding, she thought, "It must be because he is lonesome, and it grows hard for him. How he has suffered, poor soul! He needs rest, rest alone."

"Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . ."

"Sister, you had better do something for him or call in the warden," she heard one of the wounded say from somewhere in a corner.

"All right, I will return presently," replied Vera, and, rising, went to see Nelidov.

The temperature showed 39.

"Thirty-one and five-tenths," lied little Vera; "a small rise has taken place, though. Go to sleep now. I will visit you once more, to see if you are obedient."

"Vera Pavlovna, wait. Who is it that screams so awfully?"

"A soldier, whose finger is swollen."

"Ah . . . ah," came through the open door.

Vera put the thermometer in its place, arranged on her way, by force of habit, the bedcover of the patient and went out again into the large hall.

At first she thought of calling in the doctor, but remembering how he had grumbled at dinner, because the nurse on duty had twice disturbed his sleep the night before for trivial cases, she desisted.

"I will go myself. Perhaps he will let me come near him," she decided, and, bravely, with firm foot stepped up to the cot.

The wounded Austrian continued to toss about and it seemed as if he did not perceive her. Little Vera then came close behind him and placed her shoulder and arm under his head. The patient leaned against her with all his weight and continued to rock, swaying her with him. With each motion he rolled on her

with his broad uncouth frame, and his cheek pressed upon her little body. She tried hard to support his weight and not to move lest he notice her presence.

His breathing was violent and hot, and deep in his lungs little Vera could hear something that creaked and gurgled and grated. He screamed no more. He only groaned in slow, low sounds, his voice sinking lower, lower.

"Ah . . . ah . . ."

Vera sat in such a manner that she could not see his eyes and it seemed to her that he was falling asleep.

She herself grew numb because of the tension of her spirit and body; she almost stopped thinking. Time dragged, tormentingly slow. Somewhere a clock chimed. Once, then two times, then once again. . . .

At times, amidst the snoring and whistled breathing there was audible here and there a rasping of teeth or the detached, incoherent sounds of delirium. Some quietly moaned. And in the corner of the wall there sat two interlocked white figures, silent, without words, closely pressed to each other and rocking back and forth.

One—powerful, roughly hewn, desperately resisting the coming end: the other—little, phys-

ically feeble, but full of spiritual strength and beauty.

About three o'clock the agony set in.

The patient swung violently from side to side several times and fell with all the weight of his mighty body upon the bed, dragging little Vera under him. She freed herself with great difficulty from under his shoulder, arranged his feet and ran for water.

When she returned the patient was in his last struggles. His large dark eyes were unnaturally wide and stared with amazement into space, through the room, through the walls.

Something surged in his breast. His breath became broken.

"There; now that's the end," thought little Vera, standing over him and involuntarily holding her own breath. But life struggled on. When the man finally became still forever, the little white figure silently bent over his head and with two slender pink fingers closed his eyelids.

They were still warm and soft.

"He at least suffers no more," thought little Vera. This was the customary consolation in such cases.

"What, dead?" queried some one from the

opposite corner of the chamber. . . ."Peace to his soul! Many of our kind will have gone his way. I would gladly follow him, if God only willed."

"Why, what's the matter? You will recover and live," retorted Vera.

"What's life without a leg? Do you call that life?"

"Why don't you go to sleep? Does something bother you?" asked the nurse, approaching the bed.

"Yes, thoughts bothered all the time I looked at you, sister, as you rocked with the Austrian. What; are you spent?"

"No, it's nothing. I was so sorry for him; he suffered much."

"It is a pity. He, too, was a human being. Sister, won't you give me a cigarette?"

"In a minute."

Having made her rounds once more, she came again to the door of Nelidov's room and stopped, halted by indecision.

"Shall I enter? Have I a right to listen to what he tells me? It were, perhaps, better to leave him alone if he is asleep."

Deep in her heart something drew her to this room; therefore, she wavered.

After the horror just experienced, she wanted

to hear a human voice; she instinctively craved for the kindness of this dear, sensitive boy and she felt that just as he had needed her sisterly kiss so would she sacrifice all to be able to forget herself, even for a second, in loving and being loved. But she dared not think of it.

She had never yet really loved anybody. Formerly, when she lived with her parents, the thought of love never entered her mind. There was no time for love—life presented too many diversions. Here, however, on the background of human suffering, amidst the setting of horrors and mutual destruction of people, her soul lost its anchor and became chilled in perpetual fear; she wanted caresses and warmth.

Sometimes at night, lying on her hard narrow cot, she would start from some terrible dream, light the candle and pass long, long hours, open-eyed and thinking. It even happened that she became at times so frightened that she would wake her companion-nurse, Miss Kornilova, nestle up to her, kiss her and treat her, sleepy as she was, to some chocolate. So clinging to the edge of her co-worker's bed, she would slumber till morning.

If some one had asked little Vera whether she were happy or not, she would certainly have replied, "Yes," because here for the first time

she learned that she was of help to people. Deep in her soul, however, there was a void that gnawed at her heart.

Occasionally something stirred there.

There was one Russian soldier who had been long confined in the hospital. He was nervous and permitted no one to dress his wound. The "little nurse" alone could manage him. When they wanted anything done for him they sent for her, and she went to "her" patient and helped him. And the "little one" loved him for it, as a mother would, and this feeling was dear to her and cheered her.

In the same way she loved Nelidov. At least, so she thought, so it seemed to her, for she would not admit another feeling, a more selfish one; she did not permit herself to think otherwise.

Vera opened the door and peered in. Nelidov was not asleep. He sat in the same position in which she had left him two hours ago.

At first she felt a thrill of gladness at seeing him in such condition, but a closer glimpse of his inflamed, burning eyes frightened her, and her heart sank. Evidently the temperature of the patient had not fallen, but, on the contrary, was rising.

"At last!" he said, breathing heavily. "With my eyes riveted on the doorsill I have been waiting for you for three solid hours. Three hours I have been counting each second, listening for the slightest rustle. If you only knew what a torture it was! And now you have come and will put me to sleep and doctor me with morphine. Therein you see the sacred duties of a nurse. You do not understand what I have lived through in these three hours with my eyes glued to that silly white door. I thought of everything. I lived through everything. I recalled how they were shooting me full of holes there, on the field. It was so foolish, ridiculous. Was life indeed necessary to me? That blockhead thought he was making game of me. And I showed him where to aim. But the dunce missed again. Then I thought that everything was the same to me, everything. Did I suffer then? Not the least bit. I have not suffered at all during this time. But now, these hours, I have been through the utmost torture. That plank there, which you crossed—there it is,—it tormented me, and that door which would not open till now."

Nelidov reclined his head, put his hand across his eyes and heaved a deep sigh.

She stood near his bed, like a culprit, with

downcast eyes, and kept silent. Casually she leaned with her hand upon the small white table and her trembling made all the medicine bottles shake and rattle. She drew back her hand and seated herself on the chair by the wall.

Nelidov bent over his emaciated knees and sought her eye.

For a flitting instant she raised her lashes and then lowered them again, hiding her eyes.

She thought they were moist. "Bad."

"Why did you come? Tell me, was it to doctor my body, to heal a wounded hero? . . . You think I needed that? Can't you see that my soul aches? The soul alone? You kissed me this evening. No, it was not a kiss,—just a lip-touch, for the dead. Do you know what it has meant to me? Happiness, insane happiness. That alone has kept me alive all these three hours. I stared at that door there and waited, while you were outside nursing a kicker with a swollen finger. And I will wait again. I ask for nothing of you now. Later, after the war. Then will you let me come to you? Then—if I find you—you will not drive me away? You will let me love you? Tell me, do tell me, dear. Will you be mine? No, not simply mine; no, not that—I want to love you forever. Will you be my wife?"

Vera rose quietly from her seat, walked up to him and touched his forehead. Her face appeared composed; only her eyes looked different.

"I came to see you because I feared you did not sleep. You see how disturbed you are. The doctor ordered in such cases not to fail to give you an injection."

"Again, again the same thing. Oh, this is awful. Tell your doctor that he is a dolt. He doesn't know a thing. But you, why don't you understand? . . . Do you believe in the immortality of the soul? Tell me that you believe, yes?"

"Well, all right; I do."

"And still you don't misunderstand? If I love you, what difference is there whether I live or die? The love will remain. What I live through now will exist forever, won't it? It will, yes? And you here talk of medicine. A thing that no one needs, that will pass away. Do you wish my soul to live, and be ever happy? Do you? Yes? Tell me, do you? Then say that you love me, a little. A little bit, at least. Look at me; raise your lashes."

"Will you let me, then, inject the morphine?"

"Yes, yes, anything you want."

"Very well, I love you."

"My darling." . . . Nelidov bent over and wheezed through his nose. "Do with me what you please. Put me to sleep, stab me—it's all the same to me, absolutely the same. Darling, you do not deceive me?"

"No, no."

"Truly?"

"Yes, truly, only don't interfere now. I will prepare the syringe and make the injection. Lie quiet."

While little Vera busied herself with the preparations, Nelidov did not take his eyes off her, but watched her every movement. He gazed upon her long, well-shaped fingers; he watched those fingers as they moved gracefully and dexterously about their work—and he was happy.

While she pricked his arm, he lay still and looked under her eyelashes.

"Now, sleep."

"All right. Only let me kiss your hands. Both. They both labored for me. They are mine? Yes?"

"Yes, yes. Sleep. Good-by, till morning."

In half an hour dawn broke. Little Vera came again to Nelidov's door, stood for a while undecided and then walked silently in. He was sound asleep.

She neared the head of his bed and gave him a long tender kiss.

Retracing her steps, she halted at the door, stopped, and wiped the tears from out her eyes.

On the following day Nelidov got worse.

"Little Vera" would not leave his bed and kept watch over him.

In the evening the patient lost his memory.

After two days he passed away, without gaining consciousness.

WAR VISIONS

WAR VISIONS

THE war relics of devastated structures leave a sad and painful impression.

Of the many deserted battlefields which I have seen during the two years passed; of the nameless little graves faintly marked with little wooden crosses; of the deserted trenches, nothing gave me so much food for deep and sad reflection as the bare and lonely chimneys projecting from amid piles of rubbish, melancholy blackened blots, the scattered remnants of domesticity; a smashed pail, a broken wheel, a binding of a torn book, the splinters of what was once a crib.

To think that hereabout dwelt a family; that they were contented, and possibly happy.

Those walls stripped and crumbled, what have they not seen!

It always seems to me that an event having occurred at a given place, the memory of the occurrence attaches itself permanently to it. Whenever I happened to find myself in a locality in which some memorable events had taken

place I could not think of those events without at the same time visualizing the surroundings amid which they occurred; and the more recent the occurrence, the more vividly I can see the scene unfolding itself before my eyes.

To think of the number of such impressions, which the present war has scattered.

It is a film vivid and endless.

I remember one such pile of ruins, which I saw not far from the road leading to Jaroslav. This ruin remained permanently fixed in my memory by reason of a horrible tale connected with it.

Some time ago there lived on this farm a well-to-do Galician gardener. When the war broke out he was drafted into the army, and he went forth leaving behind him a wife and three small children. Shortly following his departure troops commenced appearing in the immediate neighborhood. At first there came small detachments, but these were quickly followed by more formidable bodies. In a short time lines of trenches were dug on both sides of the farm and real warfare begun.

The firing was continuous. The family sought safety in the corners of their hut. They hid in the cellar under the heaps of beets and potatoes, but the children soon became accus-

tomed to the hissing of bullets and lost all fear of them.

The wounded soldiers, for the most part Austrians, began crawling towards the farm. There they bound up their wounds. The children looked on and sometimes gave aid, holding with their little tiny fingers the blood soaked cotton or winding long and transparent bandages around the wounded limbs. They became accustomed to the pain and the groans of the dying and in their naïve and simple way rendered all the help of which they were capable.

At night when darkness fell, and when firing from both sides would cease, the Austrians' Sanitary Corps would come, place the wounded on long and unsteady stretchers and carry them to the rear.

On one occasion the wounded sent the eldest girl to the pond to fetch some water. She stayed away for a long, long time. Later she was found lying on the grass with a bullet in her slender little shoulder. The pails lay near her empty.

During the night she, too, was placed on a stretcher and was carried away. With her went the mother and the rest of the children. From that night on the farm remained forsaken.

The wounded, however, continued crawling to the hut, their numbers increasing from day to day. At times the sanitarians were not able to reach the farm and the wounded would lay for days at a stretch without aid.

At the end of October a serious cholera epidemic broke out among the Austrian troops. From that time on there appeared among those creeping towards the lonely farm large numbers of emaciated and pale blue forms—shadows of men. On reaching the farm they would fall on the straw, coiled up and groaning in their agony, most of them to remain lying there until silenced by everlasting sleep.

There was no one to bury the bodies and they gradually began to decompose.

On top of those bodies fell more and more. It became impossible to live amid these hellish surroundings, and if by chance some unfortunate wounded happened to come along most of them would leave the little hut and limp on, preferring to dare the firing line rather than be stifled in this horrible atmosphere of death and stench.

The engagements, which had lasted several weeks, became more and more stubborn.

The trenches crept nearer and nearer until

they resembled two live gigantic horns about to embrace each other.

Presently one of the Austrian trenches came so near the farm that it became an obstacle to firing, and an order was issued to apply the torch to the encumbrance.

It was quite a dangerous task. All knew through experience that the Russians keep a sharp lookout on all that transpires in the enemy line and do not allow to pass with impunity the least move on the part of the enemy. At night the men while smoking would lay low at the very base of the trench as the mere striking of a match sufficed to draw fire from the opposite lines.

As a result of some faint noise or a slight movement vigorous firing would not infrequently burst out all along the line and instead of getting the much needed rest, the soldiers would pass nights on their feet and remain fatigued from sleeplessness and nervous exertion.

A young second lieutenant, who had but recently begun his career of battle, volunteered to apply the torch. Being an ambitious man he was at the same time limited and cowardly. He always tried to conceal his cowardice under

a mask of arrogance, pushing his way forward whenever there was an opportunity to get into the spot light, and have his name mentioned. To brace himself, the officer emptied a large glass of spirits, and taking along one of the men left the cozy sheltered trench and began feeling his way across the fields.

The night was dark as a grave and over the lowland of the garden hung a thick, milky fog. Their feet sank deep into the sticky, soaking mud. The men went slowly, bent to the ground and breathing heavily.

They continued on their way without seeing anything ahead. Though the distance between them and their object was only two hundred yards it seemed to them from time to time as if they had lost their bearings and were going in the wrong direction.

Soon they were aware of a heavy, suffocating smell; the next moment there loomed up before their very eyes a somber silhouette of a building. It stood there enveloped in fog.

Reaching a corner of the house, the lieutenant stopped short, drew from his holster a big field revolver and whispered to the man to come near.

It seemed that his main care was not that of carrying out the assumed task, but to hide con-

veniently from the Russian fire, and then slip off to the rear as soon as the house would catch fire. He figured that while the flames were spreading over the structure and before they would reach the last wall, he could quietly and without the least danger to himself remain under shelter.

As soon as the fire enveloped the structure and before the walls began crumbling, he would run back in time to avoid exposure by the conflagration.

With this in view, he gave orders to his subordinate to pile up straw on the side of the building directly facing the trenches. In the meantime the officer having taken shelter behind the opposite wall, lit a cigar and remained waiting for developments.

A few moments of long and painful suspense followed. The poor lieutenant was in a state of frenzy. It was not the personal danger alone that now excited his imagination. He was tormented by the mystic fear of that which he was about to carry out. In the darkness he drew a somber sketch of all that was hidden behind the wall, the inevitable which he was to face within a few moments.

How many of them are there? In what stage of decomposition? How do they lie?

The officer suddenly recalled a conversation in the course of which some one told him that when the flames touched the dead in the crematory they coiled and twisted as if alive. In his excited imagination he quickly pictured a wild dance of the dead which was about to begin.

"But they will calm down," he thought, "after they are burned. As soon as burning flesh is scented I will run, and then let the Russians shoot at them. All I have to do is to get away in time. If we were only done with this . . . Quick . . . Quick. . . ."

At this moment he became aware of a pleasant smell of straw smoke and immediately after the opposite corner of the structure burst out into a bright flame.

Almost simultaneously with the flash, firing began from the Russian trenches, and it seemed to the officer that a few bullets hissed nearby.

The soldier succeeded in pouring a great quantity of kerosene into the interior of the house. The fire spread with unusual swiftness. In two minutes the structure was all ablaze.

The officer stood at the open door watching curiously the interior of the main room. Scattered all over the floor there lay contorted and twisted forms. They lay in irregular heaps. It was an appalling and gruesome sight.

From somewhere protruded some one's long bare legs, near the wall lingered a lonely arm. Curled, swollen and slightly lifted, it hung in a threatening posture. From under a tattered old military coat projected a thick brush of black-blue hair, and at some distance leaning on the stone there half set a mighty figure of a stately corpse. The majestic body was bent in gloom, two huge rough and calloused hands supporting a big head.

Suddenly it seemed to the lieutenant as if he heard some one groan. The sound became more and more audible, coming nearer and nearer; one voice, a second, somebody called, a cry rang out, and suddenly pandemonium broke loose. Air rending cries came from all sides and men began to drop one by one, falling about the officer and stretching at his feet. Some fell straight from the ceiling to the earthen floor, others came creeping down the ladder; they dropped into the flames, choking and writhing in deadly agony.

The officer, half dead from fright, drew his revolver and opened fire. He ceased firing, when his supply of bullets gave out. His ammunition gone, the lieutenant threw down the weapon and ran. No one will ever know the number of unfortunates he thus killed. All I

know is that of all the men hiding in the garret of that farm only one was saved. It was he who told me this terrible tale. He did this while lying in one of our hospitals. According to his version, there were at the time in the building a great number of wounded soldiers, who came there during the last engagement. When fire was set to the house, they endeavored to get down. All of them perished. Some were burned alive, while others were shot to death by their own officer. Among those who perished was also the soldier who came here with the lieutenant. He was found on the following day, his breast pierced with a bullet. The brave officer vanished without leaving a trace behind him.

These were the horrible visions: I saw them every time I chanced to pass the ruined and devastated spot. It is painful to think of this place . . . How many human sorrows it witnessed. What strength, and what spiritual weakness!

The fate of the vain and unhappy officer does not in the least concern me. I am not even disposed to blame him for his weakness. For this we can only pity a man. One is bound to pity also those who met death at his hands.

But for some reason or other I cannot help

remembering the wounded little girl. There she lay, dying from loss of blood; there at the turning of the footpath, near the two little birch trees.

AN AFFAIR OF HONOR

AN AFFAIR OF HONOR

I ONCE witnessed a unique duel.

It happened during the present war. The cavalry regiment in which I served as Red Cross worker was stationed in a forsaken locality in the Carpathians, in a small Galician village. The enemy was retreating, and while our forces were regrouping, and before fresh reserves had arrived, we were doomed to tedious inactivity. There is nothing more dreadful than the tediousness of waiting.

War, like gambling, engulfs one. When the cards are dealt out I never have the patience to wait for the outcome of the game. I am eager to know the result at once, immediately. And here, in war, it is my life that is at stake—and I am anxious to know whether my card loses or wins.

Do not believe those who say they experience no fear at war. It is not true. There are men who evince no fear, who suppress it with their will, but they do feel it, and it takes an excep-

tionally brave man to admit it. I was fond of observing the different ways in which people display this fear, for every one has his own way of showing it. Some hide it under a mask of calmness; others, on the contrary, become possessed of a sort of bravado and courage; but most frequently this fear finds expression in intensified nervousness, in a highly agitated state of the senses.

The atrocities committed by an infuriated enemy over defenseless wounded soldiers are nothing but signs of cowardice. I sometimes perceived the same cowardice in outbursts of sentimentality—towards animals, or towards a man's mother at home, to whom, in times of peace, this very man never gave a thought, and for whom he never cared.

Such is human nature—and such it will remain.

My best friends, with whom I whiled away my time in the Carpathians, were two young officers, Ensign Shumilin and Lieutenant Petrov, both well-bred young men, both excellent chums, and both enjoying splendid reputations for their boundless bravery.

Shumilin, about thirty years of age, an olive-complexioned, dark man, with merging eyebrows, at first made an impression of a person

of stern character. He was not talkative, indeed, quite reserved, and people who did not know him well thought him haughty.

At first I, too, formed a similar opinion of him. Once, however, when he told me how during an attack a little hare strayed among the pursuers, and how the soldiers caught it and carried it to the trenches with them, and how afterwards they were obtaining food for it at the risk of their lives, I divined something new in the eyes of this man, a reflection of a benevolent, childlike sentiment, and since then I understood and began to love him for his soul.

As for Petrov, I had known him before the war broke out. He was a man of a jolly disposition, an excellent guitar player and singer, indispensable at gatherings, and a great favorite with women. His only fault was a certain degree of bragging which he displayed rather frequently and which at times produced a repulsive impression. Most of all he was fond of boasting of his conquests over women.

To this day I am not fully familiar with the details of the quarrel which took place between the two friends, but quarrels are by no means a rare occurrence during a campaign. All I know is that Petrov, under the influence of intoxicants, began to tell of his relations with a cer-

tain Red Cross nurse in whom, to all appearances, Shumilin was also interested. Shumilin asked him to shut up, both grew excited, and the incident wound up with the gravest mutual insults, insults which among officers can be washed off only with blood.

The rumor of a quarrel between the two intimate friends shocked the whole regiment. No matter what we undertook, no matter what efforts we applied to reconcile them, the two enemies remained inflexible and insisted that a duel be arranged at once, on the most difficult conditions possible.

Finally the commander of the regiment intervened, sent an official invitation to the two adversaries to call on him, and decided the affair in his own way.

"We are fighting now," he said to them. "Duelling during war is prohibited, and I cannot permit two of my best officers to risk their lives needlessly. But I understand your situation and wish to help you. I will give you permission to have a duel, but on one condition, which I am going to impose on you. Here it is: We'll shortly resume the offensive. Wherever desperate bravery and self-sacrifice are required, wherever the most risky exploits are necessary—I'll send you two together. From

now on you will be united in a bond of common danger. Your quarrel will be decided not by your own bullets, but by those of the enemy. The duel will be considered ended as soon as either of you is wounded. And until then I order you to forget all that has taken place between you and to become again the same valorous comrades that you have been heretofore."

Nothing was to be said, and both officers departed in silence.

The raffle began before we expected it. The very next morning an important reconnoissance party was sent out under the command of Shumilin, with Petrov in the capacity of junior officer. The party was ordered to capture without fail one or more of the enemy's soldiers for information purposes. The enterprise was highly dangerous, one of the most daring affairs I ever heard of. The scouts numbered eight, not including the officers.

They left the village in the small hours of the morning, and at dawn reached the edge of a vast forest which, as was well known, was occupied by Austrian troops.

"Scouts, forward! Party, gallop, forward march!" loudly commanded Shumilin, giving his horse the spurs and looking around with a vigilant eye.

At this moment he forgot all about the duel and was all engrossed in the earnestness of his enterprise. He reminded himself of the duel only when Petrov, followed by his orderly, swept by on his chestnut charger, overtaking him.

"I'd just love to see how you'll feel when you come across the enemy," thought Shumilin with an evil feeling of hidden vengeance.

But hardly had he become conscious of this thought when he noticed a few puffs of smoke ahead of him—and a volley was fired.

"Germans," some one near him said in an undertone.

"Charge at full speed!" Shumilin replied to the remark, and unsheathing his saber tore along the frozen road.

Reaching the meadow he noticed Petrov still racing ahead and, at a distance, a band of Austrian Hussars who had already turned their horses preparing to flee. One of them, a stout and short-legged officer, kept jumping on one foot around his large thoroughbred horse and could by no means get his foot into the stirrup. Shumilin was on him but Petrov had already a hold of the horse's bridle.

"Hold the prisoner, I'll pursue the rest," shouted Petrov and swept on.

"Where are you going? Come back!" cried Shumilin after him, but it was too late, and Petrov disappeared behind the bushes.

"He'll be killed, he will," thought Shumilin with alarm, forgetting all about the duel, and dashed after his comrade at full speed.

The scouting party having splendidly executed its assigned task, did not return until evening, having lost but three soldiers killed in the skirmish, and bringing in four prisoners, among them the officer with German maps and important documents in his possession.

Shumilin reported officially the limitless bravery of Lieutenant Petrov, while the latter declared before everybody that the enterprise was a success due solely to the courage and determination of the head of the scouting party, and that he would refuse a reward unless one would be given also to Ensign Shumilin.

Neither of the duelists was wounded, and the duel had to be continued.

The second act of the combat took place in the trenches and lasted a whole month. The regiment was dismounted and intrenched. The two rivals sat almost side by side, a few paces from one another, before the barbed wire en-

tanglements of the enemy and for a whole month kept on tempting fate with their acts of desperate madness.

But, as is usual in such cases, fate spared them. They slept together, almost side by side, ate dinner together, and together exposed their breasts to the fire of the Austrians. But they never spoke to each other—they were enemies.

At first, as during the reconnoissance sortie, they tried to outrival each other, and sought in each other signs of cowardice and faint-heartedness. But there was no trace of cowardice in either of them. On the contrary, both of them carried their bravery to madness, and each was aware of it—in the other.

Gradually the petty feeling of lying in wait and jealousy gave way first to a certain degree of mutual astonishment, and finally to full mutual respect and even more than that. Often they secretly admired each other.

But they were enemies and were not on speaking terms.

At length their constant association, their constant being together resulted in their getting used and in becoming indispensable to each other. Whenever one of them stood up waist high above the trench, thus attracting a hail of

the enemy's bullets, the other would look at him with trepidation, fear for him, and pray in his innermost soul that the bullets might spare his adversary.

But neither dared say it loudly—they were enemies.

They conquered the most powerful feeling in men, the fear of death. They conquered their mutual hatred and envy; moreover, they forgot their mutual insults and offenses, but when it came to the feeling of petty selfishness, cheap and unnecessary, they could not overcome it, and both maintained a stern silence, and hid from themselves as well as from others their best impulses.

They were enemies!

Death raged all around them, the regiment thinned down, having lost more than half of its number in killed and mangled, but the two enemies still continued to turn away from and would not speak to each other. And yet—how often did they experience a keen desire to make up and be friends as before!

Why, then, did they not communicate their thoughts to each other? Why did they look at each other only at night when one of them, wrapped up in his tarpaulin sack, slept and could not see the expression of his "enemy's"

face, as the latter carefully adjusted his comrade's damp overcoat?

The trench warfare resulted in one of the largest battles of that year. Our regiment was in the thick of the fighting and suffered tremendous losses.

During sorties, the rivals were near each other. In the confusion of the attack, deafened by the roar of cannon, by the rattling of machine guns and incessant explosions of shrapnel and hand-grenades, the soldiers rushed forward, breaking through the barbed wire entanglements in that bewildered state of mind, when all consciousness ceases, and one yields one's self to the elemental forces, without restraint; perhaps even like a madman. One has no time to think on such occasions. Only impressions and images become indelibly imprinted on one's mind with an unusual force.

Whoever has experienced this feeling once is sure never to forget it.

One cannot possibly forget an attack. It haunts one in dreams at night, it pursues the imagination like a nightmare during spells of insomnia, and in one's dying hour one sees before him images of infuriated, beastlike faces, images of lost comrades, and of the stricken, helplessly falling enemy. . . .

Thunder, smoke, blood—and, mainly, men's eyes.

Eyes! All sorts of expressions. All shades, beginning with the ravenous beastly glance of an attacking soldier, and ending with the glassy, dreadful eyes of a silent corpse.

The entire life of Mankind with all its experiences lies in those eyes. . . .

The last Shumilin saw of Petrov was on the very ridge of the enemy's trench. The remnants of the enemy's detachment were still holding out in the trenches, and a hand-to-hand fight was going on.

It was over in a few minutes, for the few remaining Austrians had surrendered and the trench was ours.

Shumilin, following his habit, looked around seeking Petrov with his eyes, and failed to discover him.

"He must have been killed," he thought, his heart sinking within him. He ran along the trenches examining the corpses.

Petrov lay, motionless, on the bottom of the trench.

Shumilin jumped down, bent over him and listened for his breathing.

"God be thanked, he's alive," he said, almost aloud and called the Red Cross men.

Shumilin himself lifted his enemy, carefully examined his wound—Petrov's breast had been shot through—and placed him on a stretcher.

The wounded officer came to at the field lazaret, in my presence.

His very first question was whether Shumilin was alive.

"He is, and luckier than you, too, I have not even been wounded," responded Shumilin who sat nearby awaiting with anxiety the physician's verdict.

The patient made an effort to shake hands with his comrade, but Shumilin rose and kissed Petrov's head.

"Those confounded nerves!" he muttered, stepping aside and wiping away a tear.

"I'm glad our duel is over," moaned Petrov in a hardly audible voice, and once more lost consciousness.

I left the theater of war operations while Petrov was convalescing.

Shumilin visited him daily and treated him with all the tenderness of a brother. He confessed to me that during the last attack he

HIS FIRST QUESTION WAS WHETHER SHUMULIN WAS ALIVE.

An Affair of Honor)

had vowed, were he to remain alive, to make up with his enemy.

But he had not the time to do it.

His commendable impulse was not destined to be realized.

It was forestalled by the enemy's bullet.

THE SCARLET BASHLYKS

THE SCARLET BASHLYKS

When war broke out and the news spread over vast, immeasureable Russia, the sons of the various peoples that make up this mighty empire heard the call, and like one man flocked to the defense of their common land.

Wild and independent Caucasus, the beauty spot of Russia, so recently joined to its present Mother-country, heard of the war; and, like an eagle waking after a long sleep, stretched its mighty wings, and together with the rest of Russia, dashed off to the West to meet the foe.

The division, consisting of six select Caucasian cavalry regiments bearing the names of the tribes of which they were composed, were at once nicknamed "wild" in the everyday life at the front. All the men of this division, both privates and officers, were volunteers. The horses under them were their own, brought from their native hills; even their weapons, barring the guns and rifles, were their own, family heirlooms, the pride of many generations.

Sixty years ago, with these same weapons, the fathers and grandfathers of these soldiers

had fought for independence against Russia; and now, side by side with their former enemies, they are fighting for a common Motherland against an ancient common foe.

I met this Division in Lvov, the capital of Galicia; and I am happy that I was able to spend some time with these men in surroundings of war in the very depths of the Carpathian Mountains.

I was attached to the Staff of the Cavalry Corps as member of the Red Cross.

I remember the first impression I had of these people when I arrived in the tiny Galician village at the foot of the hills, on what happened to be a regimental feast day. It was wonderful autumn weather. The whole regiment was drawn up on a green field by the roadside; the sun gilded the tops of the distant hills.

During the review, which was held by the commanding officer, the squadron passed by us in rows; and to the music of native airs the riders and their steeds caracoled with such marvelous grace and beauty that I shall never forget the scene.

First, the music. Wild, primitive melodies, often with a plaintive note, came from some special wind instruments, reminding one of shepherds' pipes; only the beat of the drum

gave energy and relieved the minor tone. To this sound of the pipes the Caucasian hillmen caracole on their horses, dance on feast-days, rush to battle—die.

Their horses are small, active, wiry; and the riders sit so freely and gracefully that it would seem as though they were born on horseback. Man and horse are one; and looking at them you do not know which is the more beautiful. Both man and horse are decorated.

A silver bridle, saddle, silver or gold dagger at the belt, curved sword, of silver and Damascus steel, on the breast a row of silvered rifle cartridges, a huge yellow sheep's hat on the head—these are the ornaments habitual to every one of these men. And to cap it all, each one of them wears a bright red woollen *bashlyk*.[1] This is the sign of fearlessness; a sort of challenge thrown to the enemy.

"I have no fear of you. My bright-colored *bashlyk* is seen everywhere; its color is a conspicuous bright spot all around. I know this, and I wear it purposely. I am not afraid of you."

In the introduction to his posthumous story, "Hadji-Murat," my father compares a Cau-

[1] *Bashlyk* is a head cloth resembling that worn by monks, with a point at the top, with two long ends to wrap around the throat.

casian hillman to the pretty field flower, "Tatarnik."

Watching the regiment before me, I recollected this comparison and saw its aptness.

After the review there was dinner. Wine was drunk; and dancers from Daghestan performed their favorite dance—the lezginka. Sticking their daggers, as sharp as razors, into the ground, they flew about, to the tune of their native music, in their wild, impulsive and inspired dance—heedless, fearless, agile, like panthers.

Look at them I thought, "How well they take in joy! How thoroughly and heartily they enter into these bright moments of common pleasure, common holiday.

"And to-morrow brings battle. How many of these will that battle leave cripples; and how many will it carry away from us forever—never to return?"

A few days later fighting recommenced. Along a mountain ridge, waist-deep in snow, the regiment passed over the crest of the Carpathians, and in the dead of night, just before daybreak, fell on the Austrian staff headquarters. It was a thunderbolt for the enemy. It was unbelievable that at this time of the year

it was possible to cross the Carpathian strongholds; the place was considered impenetrable.

The battle was short and ended in complete victory for the Caucasians. The entire staff of the enemy was captured.

Returning, the hillmen brought some of their wounded and dead comrades on the backs of their horses.

The bond between these men is great. "Kunak" is their name for a friend, and never and under no circumstances will they abandon one. With them, friendship is a cult, a religion. And in battle, seeing one of "his own" falling, the hillman forgets all danger, and runs to succor a Kunak. No wounded are ever left in the hands of the enemy.

After the battle the wounded were placed in the hospital. Among them was an officer, an Eastern Prince, one of whose legs had to be amputated.

I saw him the next day. Pale and weak from loss of blood he was lying there. With a distant look in his large divining eyes, staring straight ahead of him, he quietly hummed the dancing tune of the Caucasian lezginka.

Seeing me, he stretched out his hand.

"Thanks for coming to see me, Kunak."

"Tired?"

"No."

"Your leg painful?"

"My heart aches and not the leg. I want to fight again but no more fighting for me without a leg. No! I think when I get up, even without the leg I'll jump on my horse and will fight."

A few days later blood-poisoning set in; and his strength was ebbing from hour to hour. But all the time he hummed his tune, the same lezginka, only slower and slower, lower and lower. Now hardly audible, just with his breath.

He died with that song on his lips; and his brother serving in the same regiment took an oath over the corpse that his death would be avenged, and that with his own hands he would cut up ten Austrians.

I do not know whether he carried out this oath, as within a few months he also fell, like so many of his comrades; like half of the original number of the division.

The ranks of the regiments, though, do not thin. They are filled with hosts of new volunteers with bright red bashlyks; fearless, untamed.

Bright wild flowers of wonderful primitive Caucasus!

THE LITTLE GREEN STICK

THE LITTLE GREEN STICK

This fantastic tale is an attempt to answer the question that is asked me so often: "What would your father say about the war if he were living to-day?" My father is buried in the woods about a mile from his home at Vasnaya Polyana. This place he chose himself in memory of his beloved eldest brother, Nicolai, and the fairy tale that he heard from him. In this place, says the tale, is buried a little green stick on which is written a word that will render all men brothers, and all people happy.—I. T.

No time; no space.

Sometime, long, long ago—the oldest men cannot remember it, and tradition has long since disappeared—there were some mills on this spot. Men dug ore from the bowels of the earth and burned it in furnaces.

Ages have passed. The land has been covered by soft meadows and deep shadowed woods; a blue carpet of forget-me-nots adds a pleasant tinge of color to the landscape; only a few small hills here and there, as if set to order, testify to the fact that some time, long, long ago, there had been a busy life here. The soil is black, mixed with grains of slag, granulated and glistening.

It was more than eighty years ago. Two blue-eyed boys, one twelve and the other five years old, roamed through these woods telling each other stories.

The younger one, Liovushka, listens with awe and admiration to the older one whom he loves dearly and for whom he is so full of respect that he does not even address him by "thou," but by "you"—"Nikolenka-you." They are both talking of love; that all men must some day become brothers; that all men will love one another and will help one another; just like ants on their mound; they will be "ant-brothers." Some day this will be, but to be brothers, one word must become known.

This word Nikolenka wrote on a little green stick, and this little stick he buried here on the slope in the black soil.

Whoever will find this little stick will make men brothers, and every one happy.

No time, no space.

Ages passed.

Peasants came to the slope with shovels in their hands. They dug a three-yard grave at the summit; and the next day a multitude of people gathered here and into the dug grave

they lowered the corpse of a gray, robust old man.

Among the seven oaks a bed of flowers has grown on this grave, and often men gather around the spot. They stop, raise their hats and stand in silent meditation. Some careful hand has laid flowers upon the bed, and the same hand throws daily handfuls of oat-seeds among the flowers.

Sparrows and pinnocks flutter over the tops of the trees and joyfully whistle their mutual greetings. When the people disappear, they come down upon the slope, pick up the grains, hide them in the crevices of the oak-bark as if in a vise, and artfully peck out the kernels with their beaks. The empty spikes, like the bristles of a brush, are sticking out of the crevices along the trunks of all the seven oaks.

At night a hare often roams around the grave. He jumps upon the pathway, scents human traces, picks up the stems of hay, sits up on his hind legs, rushes hither and thither, and, doubling on his trail, makes a hasty leap and disappears to the byway.

Then behind the slope he builds his lair.

Days and nights close in over the grave.

Years are fleeting.

No time—Years pass.

There was a night. The earth was covered with the first light winter snowfall. No moon; but the whole western horizon was purple red with fire. The sky was bathed in blood. The long fiery tongues were blazing so glaringly that the shadows of the oaks upon the snow seemed to dance.

Slowly a spirit rose from the grave—and in measured steps he walked to the highway.

In his hands he held a little green stick.

He looked around. Cherishingly he beheld the little stick, read the word scratched on it in an uneven childish handwriting, and with a speedy and noiseless step he moved towards the house.

Midnight was approaching; people were going to bed and all around was silence and darkness. Only in the West that lurid fire was burning.

He walked around the house and peeped into the window by the porch; the only window in which a light was shining. The panes of glass were coated with silvery glistening crystals of hoar frost, and he had to warm them with his breath before he could look in.

She sat alone, bending her near-sighted eyes over a sheet of paper, and in elderly, feeble

hand she wrote something. Her face showed great affliction. Cautiously he approached her ear and gently he whispered his word to her; the word written on the little stick—

He continued to look at her.

When the word shone upon the paper and its luster reflected on her eyes and brightened her soul, he looked upon her with tears of joy in his eyes, and off he went on his way.

Through houses, humble huts and hamlets he rambled; the whole village he roamed through. He spoke the word to everybody and every one understood him. He whispered the word to children in their dreams and they rejoiced and smiled at him in their sleep.

In one of the houses he heard a noise. He went to the window and saw a drunken peasant beating his wife because she had hidden his money from him. When the drunkard became so exhausted that he fell upon the floor, his wife lifted him up and looked at him with hatred and scorn.

The spirit approached her and whispered the word to her. The woman breathed with an effort to overcome her physical pain. She approached the man who had just beaten her almost senseless, cautiously she raised his head and put a pillow under it. (Episode adapted

from the novel of Polentz' "The Peasant.")

In another place he found two brothers quarreling over the partition of a parcel of land; and here, too, he helped them by his word.

Many people has he visited; and many a time he spoke the coveted word of Nikolenka—and everywhere this word aided the people and made them brothers.

But the West was still aflame.

The spirit stood hesitating, meditating; and finally, determined, was off with a firm step towards the purple, burning sky. Thunder roared from afar; lightning zigzagged through the sky, and the blasting grew more and more terrific and deafening. He walked with quickened step, all the while closely pressing his little stick to his bosom.

On the outlines of the fire he could discern the faint features of men hurrying and rushing somewhere, as people usually rush to a fire. Confused and disconcerted people rushed by; some towards him; other past and ahead of him. The faces of all of them were full of anguish and terror. He was so anxious to help them, he wanted to tell them but one word, only one word; but his feeble, senile voice was drowned by the roar of the thunder, and in the fumes of smoke people did not notice him.

Long stood the spirit on the field furrowed by narrow trenches and ditches. Finally he turned around; and, noticed by no one, slowly wended his way back to his refuge; back to his ravine, to the seven oaks.

No time, no space.

The fire will be extinguished.

The sacred, coveted word will some day be heard.

The little green stick is there; its power must manifest itself upon the earth.

It is dawning. The sparrows and pinnocks wake up and joyfully they are twittering on the bare branches of the oaks.

The white hare is taking his day's repose in his warm lair.

The pure white fresh snow has decked the earth.

The fog is rising; and from behind the milky way shine the first rays of the bright rising sun.

STORIES OF RUSSIAN LIFE

TOO LATE

TOO LATE

My wife died forty days ago.

The priests came in the morning and served mass.

I did not want to leave my room, but sister Varia came in, all in tears, and dragged me out almost by force. When I entered the drawing room I was at once overwhelmed by the suffocating odor of incense. The servants crowded at the door, coachman Ivan, with smoothly pomatumed hair, was busy wielding the censer, the deacon was distributing candles, and in the front, at the window, stood the children. In white, clean dresses, with thin legs, they nestled to the nurse and seemed to me frightened and piteous.

Especially Tanya.

I perceive that her seven-year-old brain is undergoing a conscious process of grief, and I am astonished at the fortitude with which she bears it. As if she knows something we grown-ups cannot grasp.

Every morning, when she comes to greet me she looks at me with such tenderness in her eyes that a dread comes over me and I rudely turn away from her. To look at Misha also causes me pain—he resembles his mother too closely.

After mass, when they began to sing "Eternal Memory" my nerves again played me false and in order not to burst into tears in everybody's presence I returned to my room.

They all pity me, take care of me, are moved by my love for my deceased wife. This is unbearable. I cannot live like this any longer. From the very day of her death I have been trying to understand all that took place, and the more I think of it the more entangled do I get. Is it possible that my whole life has been a continuous self-deception? And was it indeed necessary to kill my wife in order to come finally to my senses? I make an endeavor to look over the memories of the entire period of my conscious life and to find among them at least one act without an underlying motive of egoism in its rudest aspect,—and I cannot find any.

I shall begin with my youth.

It causes me pain to recall that period of

my life, just as in youth it was painful to recall my childhood,—I was so much better then. It seemed as though only good things were in store for me—and I endeavored to preserve myself for them and kept on preparing for life. I did not live, I only anticipated life. As luck would have it, I remained chaste and without knowing woman to my very wedding day. And well did I know how to pride myself on it. With what haughty disdain did I regard my chums when, after a spree they would betake themselves to the women, while I would very proudly bid them good-by at the threshold of the house of ill-repute and go home to sleep.

My moral chastity was my only trump and I used it in the game in order to rise above others at least in one respect. That is why I took care to preserve my chastity.

I never told anybody that many a time I found myself on the very brink of falling and if, after all, I saved myself it was only due to chance.

I remember Varia, the chambermaid, who slept in the hallway opposite my parents' bedroom. Had she slept somewhere further away, at the other end of the house it would have been much more difficult for her to get rid of me when I used to come at night and annoy her. I also remember the modiste, Lienka, with

whom I made an appointment for ten o'clock in the evening in the wood-house. I disappointed her and did not come because that very day some one told me she was sick. I also remember the black-eyed chambermaid, Liza, who stayed with us only one week. My parents noticed that I became too frequent a visitor to the maid-servants' room—and discharged her.

The number of such cases proving my cowardice and vileness, was very great. Of course, I kept them secret even from my most intimate friends because it did not pay me to admit that my chastity was purely accidental. It behooved me to display my achievement in order to flaunt and show my pride in it.

Chaste people are invariably of an amorous disposition.

My love affairs began at the age of fifteen. And since then not a minute of my life passed but I was infatuated by one woman or another. As soon as one affair was over I would immediately start another; and thus I always found myself in a hurly-burly of voluptuous desires.

It must have been instinctively that I never fell in love with married women, probably feel-

ing myself unequal to resisting the temptations held out by them.

In my self-delusion I attempted to convince myself and others that it is a crime to solicit the love of a woman who belongs to another, and therefore I preferred to corrupt with my love-making sixteen-year-old girls with whom success was a foregone conclusion almost in every case.

And how could they possibly help loving me, who so adroitly played before them the part of a pure, chaste youth languishing under the yoke of an incessant struggle with temptation?

And whenever I approached my pure ideal in whose name I waged the struggle and implored to grant me "at least a drop of sympathy" to strengthen me on my difficult road—needless to say, it was next to impossible to refuse me. And from heartfelt sympathy to an innocent caress, to a brotherly kiss is not far to travel. And was not all this nothing but lewdness, willful and artful? In what, then, did I differ from my spoiled chums? Perhaps in that they acted in a straightforward manner and took the responsibility for their actions on themselves while I disguised my carnal desires under a mask of purity.

I do not know which is worse.

And thus I lived until the age of nineteen.

When I made the acquaintance of my future wife she was sixteen years old.

She was a jolly, rustically simple girl, beautiful in her straightforwardness and purity.

It was at Moscow, in her parents' home.

The very first evening of our acquaintance we became engaged in a lively game of blind man's buff, and were so carried away by it that I had my new coat torn. At supper I very cleverly joined the conversation of the older folks and tried my best to make a show with my moral arguments, most probably of a very naïve character, but they must have made an impression on her. And this was all I needed. She became firm in the conviction that I was a jolly good fellow and—what is most important—a youth of high morals.

Two years later I left the university, got married and settled in the country. Since then I have been living here for the last eight years without leaving the place once.

I remember how I brought my young, inexperienced Liza to my family estate.

It was on a deep-black autumnal night. After we left the railway carriage, riding along the muddy road, full of holes and hollows, seeing nothing before us in the darkness, jumping

up and down and bumping into each other in the wicker seat of the country buggy, she nestled to me and laughed like a child. It was comical, indeed, and rather in queer contrast with the magnificent wedding dinner at Moscow, with the softly lit compartment in the railway carriage, with the elastic velvet couches in which we had been sitting for a few hours, exchanging caresses once in a while, and hiding with all our might our thoughts from one another.

And I myself joined in her laughter because my nerves were overstrained.

It was then that I for the first time happened to think of the tremendous moral responsibility I had taken upon myself by having married her, and I vowed to myself to do all in my power to make my wife happy.

My only aim in life then was to gratify her thoughts and wishes, and it seemed to me I loved her.

We grew accustomed to each other in an appallingly short period of time, and for a few years in succession I had felt so happy with her that I did not even notice how the time flew.

The calm and happy existence I led served to

deaden still more the hardly perceptible traces of Good which had still been in me and, ultimately, I became altogether hardened.

I did not even notice how my wife and I exchanged rôles.

It turned out in the end that it was not I who tried to make her happy, but on the contrary I led an entirely inane animal existence, and she watched over my idleness, and herself bore all the burdens, beginning with the administration of our estate and ending with household duties and the care of the children.

Giving birth to a boy, three years ago, she became dangerously ill and was on the very verge of death. The doctors told me that childbirth was dangerous for my wife's life, and advised us to take precautions against conception. Accidentally this happened to coincide with the commencement of my activity in Zemstvo affairs.

In the company of neighbors and friends I diverted myself with hunting, meetings, carouses, and little by little I learned to keep away from my family until it ceased to disturb me.

And it was then that I became acquainted with Natasha.

How painful it is to recall all that! And

how difficult it is to compel myself to think and not to lie to myself. Even now . . .

Now I see many an event in a new light. I make efforts to place myself again in that half insane state in which I had been for two years —and I cannot do it. Who knows, but I may be insane now, too . . .

Even so . . .

Since I have not succeeded in deceiving myself to the last, it is better for me to pause and face the truth. And furthermore. . . .

But is it not immaterial?

I served as chairman of the District Zemstvo Administration. Forty versts from my country estate, in the most forsaken part of the district, was located the Gorki Zemstvo Hospital.

My duties included the general supervision of the business administration of the hospital, and I had to visit it a few times during the year. Oh, how I hated those journeys!

An awfully long distance, an infamously bad road, an old, decaying building always in need of repair, an ill smelling inn, and, besides, the ever changing physicians. During the two years of my service with the Zemstvo, three doctors left Gorki one after another. True,

the conditions of their life there were absolutely impossible. Everybody knew it. And for a long time every now and then voices had been raised among the members of the Zemstvo urging the necessity of thorough alterations in all the hospital buildings. But a large amount of money was required for the purpose, nobody was very persistent, and for a number of years in succession this question would be submitted to the Zemstvo and tabled from one year to another.

That year there lived in Gorki a newly appointed young physician, Panov, an idealist and energetic worker. From the very outset of his new activity he launched an insistent campaign for the improvements which he considered indispensable, and urged me to come to see him in order to devise by mutual efforts a plan for alterations.

I distinctly remember this journey because a terrible snow storm was raging that day.

A few times coachman Ivan and I lost our way; we got off the sleigh, groped for the road, or else tried to locate it by the snow-swept, hardly visible guide posts; then we would again lose the way, and find it once more. It was due only to the endurance of the horses that at about six o'clock in the evening, half frozen, all cov-

ered with snow, we reached Gorki. I alighted at the inn and went to the hospital on foot. In the entrance hall of the hospital wing I was met by the doctor.

"My God, how you look!" he said, helping me off with my fur coat, "let me have your coat, I'll have it shaken out for you at once—it is all covered with snow. Walk right in, we happen to have the samovar on the table."

"It must be terribly cold. Allow me to introduce you to my sister," he hastened to add, perceiving Natasha who stood at the door with a white apron on and smiling. It seemed to me he was afraid lest I mistake her for a chambermaid.

But could I possibly?

I stood before her picking the icicles out of my beard and moustache and scrutinizing her amiable face and searching for some memories, distant and lost—who knows where and when? Where was it that I had met her?

Why is everything in her so near and dear to me? As though I had always known her?

And yet I could not describe her appearance even now . . .

And how can I expect to be able to describe her who for two years had been dwelling in my soul and possessing my entire being and whose

image had changed in my imagination a countless number of times?

I see her before me at this moment, but she is different now and I find it difficult to restore her in my memory as I met her for the first time. I remember her large, light eyes, always with a slight expression of astonishment in them, and her long, thick braid. For some unknown reason, whenever she smiled I would begin to pity her and feel like consoling her.

Hers was the smile of a child asking forgiveness.

I did not see much of her that evening. She attended to the supper, ran to the kitchen every minute and returned all flushed and listened with interest to our conversation. I must have been scrutinizing her very closely, because she told me later that she was amazed by my fixed look, "as though I wanted to see the very bottom of her soul."

At supper, their mother, a rather elderly, carefully dressed lady joined us and the conversation became general.

I shall never forget that evening, when Natasha and I, absolute strangers, timorously listened to each other as though seeking for points of common interest. Unfortunately,

there proved to be only too many of them later on. I do not know whether I fell in love with her at first sight. It is hard to tell. In order to love a person we must know him or her thoroughly. That is why I think that the feeling which awakens in people at the first meeting is not love, but most probably, desire; and possibly, mere curiosity. Does not my greatest error lie in this direction?

After supper I intended to return to the inn, but it turned out that my hosts had already prepared a room for me and in order not to offend them I had to spend the night there. In spite of my fatigue I did not fall asleep at once.

I lay in a small cozy room, on a clean bed and sank in an idle revery. Soon everything was silent in the house. I was about to blow out the candle when I happened to notice ladies' dresses hanging in the corner and neatly covered with a white sheet. Against another wall, directly opposite me, stood an old walnut chest of drawers, and on it a small looking glass and a few trinkets.

"This must be Natasha's room," occurred to me, and at first I felt embarrassed at the thought that she gave me her bed to sleep in.

But afterwards, very soon afterwards, this

bashful feeling gave way to a new, keen sensation of cynical curiosity, so alluring that I had to make an effort in order not to succumb to it, and I blew out the candle. In the darkness the feeling of uneasiness became still more acute.

Now, after my wife's death, I know that a room preserves for a long, very long time a particle of the soul of the man or woman that occupied it.

I know it now, for I cannot enter her room without seeing her there and even hearing her breathe,—but then, in Natasha's room, all I felt was an incomprehensible titillation of which I was not conscious at the time.

I awoke rather early, got up at once and began to dress. Washing myself I caught a glimpse of the hem of a light gray skirt which protruded from under the bulging sheet, recollected my nocturnal thoughts and once more felt somewhat ashamed.

I felt as though I overheard something or peered through a key hole.

The same feeling arose in me when I entered the dining room in the morning and met Natasha's childishly confiding glance.

She stood with her white apron on, at the boiling samovar preparing tea. Through the window panes covered with hoar frost, through

the brightly sparkling figures, shone the red winter sun.

"Mother has not got up yet, and Petia went to see his patients so as to get through earlier," she said, shaking hands with me. "Please sit down. What will you have, tea or coffee? Have you slept well? I was afraid you would feel uncomfortable in a small room. But it is warm there, isn't it?"

"Natalia Michailovna, it was your room and I'm very sorry you troubled yourself about me," I said, admiring her handsome, strong hand with which she was serving the tea.

"Oh, nonsense, I have slept in mother's room. I sleep there often anyhow, especially when she's indisposed. I am very fond of her divan, it is so wide and comfortable. I always slept on it when I was a child," answered Natasha and for some reason or other got embarrassed. I noticed the guilty look in her eyes and smiled against my will.

"What are you laughing at?" she asked, intercepting my smile.

"Because it is strange to hear you say of yourself: 'When I was a child.' One would think you were grown up now."

"Of course, I am. I'm already eighteen. I've graduated from the pedagogical class of

the gymnasium this year and shall soon become a teacher. I've been dreaming of it all my life. It is such an interesting profession."

"And where would you like to teach?" I inquired.

"It is immaterial to me, but mother doesn't want me to leave her and insists that I ask to be appointed to our school in Gorki. You never visited it. It has about fifty pupils, and I am very fond of children," she said and became lost in thought.

How lovely she was at that moment! While she spoke, I watched the expression of her face without taking my eyes off her.

Of course I promised her on the spot to obtain a position for her not later than next spring. It gave me pleasure to watch her joy and to be active together with her in school affairs. Half an hour later the doctor came, drank his glass of tea hurriedly and took me along with him to the hospital wards.

Having inspected everything, I prepared together with Peter Michailovitch a detailed plan of alterations, ate my breakfast and departed.

Passing the Zemstvo school I suddenly felt a desire to see it and halted the horses.

I opened the door and entered a large, light room; the children jumped to their feet with quite some commotion, the teacher pulled nervously the collar of his soiled shirt, and I myself felt lost during the first minute, not knowing what I came for.

As usual in such cases, after the first minute of surprise, the children became accustomed to the situation, and I asked the teacher to go on with the lesson and not to pay any attention to me.

The advanced section was having a lesson in dictation.

Watching the pock-marked seminary graduate slowly pacing to and fro across the class room and fixing at every step his eye glasses which had a tendency to slide off his large nose, and listening to his clear enunciation of the sentences of some foolish story, I thought very sincerely that I was interested in the school. And it seemed to me that intercourse with these little men clad in dirty hemp shirts and large felt boots, was pleasant and dear to me.

And for all I know it might have been so. But why was it that before meeting Natasha I never visited the schools except when as a member of the Zemstvo I had to be present at the examinations?

At the time this question somehow did not occur to me . . .

When I was on my way home the weather was frosty and sunny. No trace remained of yesterday's snow storm. Only in a few places, in the narrow village streets rose the glossy humps of snow drifts deposited during the night, and the newly cleaned, soft trail of the road wound in a novel, strange manner. Now it ducked under the very windows of the peasants' cottages, now it rose and ran almost on a level with the roofs, now it suddenly made a sharp turn and unexpectedly led somewhere into a backyard. In such places the horses would prick up their ears and thrust their heads into the road, the coachman would rise in his seat and strongly pull at the hempen rein. Men with spades were bustling around the cottages. At a distance, behind the snow drifts, only their bare heads were visible and it seemed as though they were buried in the snow up to their waists.

There was less snow on the fields. The wind had swept it off the ice-glazed road. The sleigh glided lightly, and only at times running into the fluffy sand banks stretching across the road, it would jump up softly; the irritating creaking

of the runners would cease for a moment and my face would be scalded by the stinging snow dust.

How light and gay everything seems in such weather!

How vigorous one feels!

Wrapped up in a warm dry fur coat and analyzing my impressions, it suddenly dawned on me that I was determined to insist upon rebuilding the Gorki hospital that very year. The rest of the time spent on my homeward journey I was reflecting upon the report which I had to submit at the next meeting of the Zemstvo.

The report seemed to me so strong and convincing, that there was not the least doubt of its being approved.

On my return home I told my wife in detail about my journey and at the same time flattered myself with my decision concerning the hospital. I knew she would praise me, and it pleased me considerably.

I mentioned in passing the physician's sister, "a very charming girl," in order not to keep anything secret from my wife. And I always used to do so, because it was more convenient.

After all, I deceived my wife as well as myself.

But, perhaps, she was happier than I for she died without having understood all my meanness. She loved me too well. Whenever I pretended to be interested in social activities, she would sympathize with me and would become enthusiastic over my plans more than I myself would. How often I followed her carefully thought-out and sincere advices! But I never admitted it to her. On the contrary, I treated her in such a way as to make her think that every time she interfered with my affairs—I felt displeased and disturbed. And she would modestly lower her large, kind eyes and change the subject of the conversation.

Was she indeed unconscious of my littleness?

A month later the meeting of the Zemstvo took place, and it was decided to begin work on the rebuilding of the hospital at once. The building materials had to be stored up during the winter, and the work was supposed to begin in the spring.

My visits to Gorki became more frequent.

At the same time I arranged for Natasha's appointment as teacher. Carried away by her work, and always absorbed in it, she became each time I saw her lovelier and more endeared

to me. Was there anything we did not discuss during those long winter evenings which I used to spend at Panovs?

How hotly we used to argue about educational questions, about social activity and about literature.

And strangely enough—I was interested in her views and listened to her attentively. And at night I would lie in her little, cosy, warm room and recall her words, her voice. : . .

Little Tanya was taken ill this morning and I have spent the whole day at her bedside. This morning her temperature rose above the normal, and her throat was affected.

She lay in her little bed, all flushed, throwing about her bare arms and moaning. A few times she grew delirious, kept on calling Mama and telling her something. Misha was kept in the parlor but he escaped twice and rushed noisily into the nursery.

Seeing my stern glance he would become abashed and leave the room bending his little back.

The doctor came in the evening and diagnosed Tanya's sickness as angina.

At present she is feeling better,—she is asleep. I sit in the adjoining room the door of

which is open and hear her quick, childish breathing. Just now I have recalled a trifling incident, which occurred recently, after Liza's death. It was at twilight. I was sitting on my sofa and thinking of something.

The children were playing in their room.

Tanya wanted a pencil for some purpose.

She ran tip-toe into my study and went over to my writing table. Taking a pencil she looked around and not seeing me made a sign of the cross over my bed. I called her over to me and began to tell her that she did a foolish thing. She began to cry. Only afterwards, when she ran out of the room, I understood that I acted meanly. The children are my real judges. All this time I have been trying to avoid them because I fear them. And yet how dear they are to me! If I but dared love them! All day long I felt Liza's presence so clearly that it seemed to me the door of her bedroom would open any instant and she would appear on the threshold.

A few times I even trembled and turned around.

And I know now that she is here, near me; I see her loving eyes before me and I know now that I never loved anybody else but her. I recall my infatuation with Natasha, I recollect how I thought at times I would be able to cross

my wife's grave in order to find happiness with Natasha—and I do not feel like believing those were my real feelings . . . And yet it was so. I consciously dreamt about it. And all my dreams have come true.

A great deal of my love for Natasha "took its usual course."

"As usual," we first became interested in each other, later we began to see something out of the commonplace in each other, which distinguished us from other people; afterwards, again "as usual," we began to believe in friendship, in pure love; finally came embraces, kisses . . . and all that was also "as usual," unintentional, and unexpected.

I am lying again.

Could it have come unexpected to me?

Since the first day of our acquaintance I began to feel that we must fall in love with each other, and I did not attempt to avert it; on the contrary, I did all in my power to bring it about. I devised all means possible, towards one end, to entangle her and myself—and, I may say, I managed it all cunningly and cleverly. Under the mask of absorbing social activity I was enabled to get rid entirely of every care of my family, and was spending almost all my time in

traveling and at Gorki. Due to my activity all the hospitals and schools of our district were brought into a most commendable condition and in many schools I succeeded in inaugurating hot luncheons for the children.

Of course, I began with Natasha's school.

But can I possibly state with clear conscience that I was doing all that only because I loved my work?

Did it not serve only as a pretext to meet Natasha more often and to show off with my work before her? I remember how once, during the first year of our acquaintance I happened to come to Gorki and remain there for the night.

Alexandra Pavlovna was not feeling well, the doctor went to visit his patients, and I spent the whole evening alone with Natasha. I had not seen her for a long time and I noticed that she was more than usually glad to see me.

"It is so nice of you to come to-night! I have been waiting for you," she said, greeting me. "Petia will come home late. If my company does not bore you, I'll stay with you."

Was there anything we left undiscussed that memorable evening? I remember it well, because it was the boundary line where it still was possible to stop, but I did not, and went fur-

ther . . . While talking we sat side by side on the divan, and my hand slipped unintentionally and touched hers. I immediately jerked it back and moved away from her.

But it was too late.

We both felt the spark of this first touch and silently exchanged glances.

Probably she, too, understood the significance of this glance, for long after it we avoided to look at each other, and our conversation lagged. Was it not a warning? Did I not know afterwards what it was leading to? At night when I was alone, I recalled the touch and the thought ran through my mind that it was necessary to escape, to save her and myself before it would be too late, but I succeeded immediately in getting rid of this thought and fell asleep with the pleasant consciousness that Natasha was under the same roof with me and that to-morrow I would see her again and talk to her and, mainly, greet her and press her hand.

The next morning I found out that Natasha was preparing to go to the city and I offered to take her there in my carriage. She accepted with enthusiasm, and we set out.

Sitting side by side in the carriage I delighted in her naïve, childish joy and was unable to take my eyes off her. She watched like a

child every movement of the horses and smiled all the time. And when Ivan let the troika run by itself on the even stretches of the road, she would lean back in the carriage and remain motionless.

I looked at her immobile, unblinking eyes, at her high, heaving bosom and at her passionate half open mouth from which were gleaming her closely set, white teeth and she seemed to me new and alluring. . . .

How lovely she was that day! I had never before seen her so pretty.

"Why do you look at me so queerly?" she asked. . . .

"Because you are so pretty to-day. Give me your hand."

"No, don't, for God's sake, what for? It is better so . . ."

But I could not restrain myself any longer. I took her hand, rolled up the glove and kissed her wrist. And I admired the frightened expression on her face and her guilty smile when she was saying all absorbed in herself:

"Why are you doing it? Don't! You have a family. We shall stop at this. Yes, for God's sake . . ."

I did stop, for just as long as was required in order to advance afterwards and be surer of

attaining my end. I showed her I was a moral man and that I was able to restrain myself. Afterwards I held her hand in mine many a time, caressed it, and touched it with my lips without kissing it. . . .

And after a few meetings I again kissed her hand, and then I dared more and more . . . I excited her nerves and her curiosity, and when she implored me with her inborn straightforwardness to take pity on her "because she was not made of stone," I played on her compassion for me and frightened her by saying I would be unable to bear being parted from her. . . .

At the same time I consoled myself with the thought that I could have taken from Natasha much more than she was giving me and that I was sparing her. And finally when I brought her down to giving herself to me entirely, I myself restrained her, because I knew that her honest, unsullied soul would not survive the disgrace of falling. I took from her all that was possible to take and, again as in my youth with all those Varias and Lizas, I restrained myself at the very threshold and preserved both her purity and mine. I did not spare her bashfulness—I compelled her to live through the torments of the most distressing inner struggle, I compelled her to deceive her old mother, to

whom she never had lied in her life, and what did I give her in return?

I gave her a great deal. Once she asked me to come and began to tell me that she could not continue living like that, that she could not bear any longer the eternal deceits, the pangs of conscience, and that it would be better for us to part forever. Without stopping to think for a single moment, I told her that I understood her fully and was going to divorce my wife and marry her.

I shall never forget the frightened expression with which she gazed on me.

It was the horror before the abyss of happiness which suddenly opened before her and about which she had never dared dream.—And she threw herself into it with all her being, but at that very moment she made an effort over herself and said in a calm voice: "No. You know yourself that one can not become happy by depriving some one else of happiness. Why, then, talk like that?"

And I was offering her a great sacrifice, was I not? I, a moral monogamist, an exemplary family man—was offering to break up my family for her sake. Could there have been a greater proof of my love for her? There was only one thing Natasha was not aware of then,

—she did not know that I would never have uttered those words to her had I not known beforehand what her answer would be. I believed in her spiritual strength, and I was not mistaken. She saw that I was heading for a precipice and tried to restrain me as best she could. Had I only listened to the dictates of her heart!

Perhaps it still would have been possible to save ourselves. But I did not feel like returning to my family, and was sinking deeper and deeper.

Many a time the question comes to my mind, did I love Natasha? What has become of the feeling which turned my life upside down? Where is it now? Why is it that after my wife's death I have not felt even a single time the desire to see Natasha? Does it not mean that I never thought of her as a friend, not even as a human being? In other words, it was only cheap and vulgar sensuality.

Is it possible? I recollect now that I never was entirely happy with Natasha. There always existed something between us that disturbed us, something we could not trespass. It must have been her conscience. And I had to violate this conscience all the time. Many a

time I would find her cold, reserved and anything but affable. And I had to force her will and torture her highly strung nerves in order to make her respond with a caress. And yet she never said "thou" to me and never called me "hers." We made a few attempts to part forever. There were long, tormenting intervals during which we avoided meeting and seeing each other for long lapses of time. I would visit the hospital, inspect the buildings, give orders and leave without seeing her.

All this was very tormenting.

I recall how once, after such a separation, we happened to meet in the hospital garden. At first we were so confused that we forgot even to greet each other. I saw how her eyes began to blink and tears appeared on her eyelashes.

"You won't believe how happy I have been all this time," she said, lowering her eyes. "Let us not spoil it. To think that I have not lied nor felt any pangs of conscience! You yourself know how bad we feel after misbehaving. When I don't see you I love you still more because I know how hard you struggle and I am grateful to you. And afterwards maybe you, too, will feel better; yes, you will."

I stood facing her, leaning against a tree and kept still . . . I was afraid to speak because I

felt that my lips were trembling. All of a sudden she bent down and kissed my hand.

"Don't, don't be so agitated, dear. I can't bear to see you suffer so greatly on my account. Is it not better that we restrain ourselves and do not sink? Are they so absolutely necessary, those kisses, those caresses? . . ."

"Of course not, I, too, appreciate your pure love . . . I want nothing else, but to see these eyes, this hand . . . I myself feel bad when I realize that I sully you with passion. Forgive me. . . ."

I do not know what else I said to her. In such moments it seemed to me that my love for her was pure and the belief in my own words used to fill me with self-admiration and tears. . . . And right there on the spot, immediately after those words were spoken, I would sink still deeper, rudely dragging her with me. And the purer my love seemed to me the more madly would flare up afterwards the basest manifestations of passion. And we would part like accomplices in a crime, in silence, without daring to look at each other, full of disbelief and disdain for ourselves.

Once Natasha happened to ask me why I had not had any children for a long time. I told

her of my wife's illness and of the doctor's warning.

"It's a pity, I'm so fond of little ones. Maybe if a child were born to you it would attach you to your family and it would be easier for you to forget me. Honestly, I'm not worthy of your love. After all, we'll have to part sooner or later. . . ."

I do not know why, but this conversation took possession of my mind. Whether it was the impending parting with Natasha or something else, but that very evening, on my return home I told my wife that I felt lonely without babies, that I loved to hear them cry at night, and that if not for her illness I would have welcomed a new child.

It appalls me to tell about it. . . .

I never knew that a human being could be so disgusting. But—further, further to the very end. If I stop here I shall not tell everything . . . And all through that night I caressed my wife, kissed her and told her I loved her. . . .

Did she know about my infatuation with Natasha?

Of course she did. Can a loving wife help knowing, when her husband loves another woman? Did she not notice how I sat on the

divan in my study for days at a stretch, my eyes fixed on one spot, without reading, without speaking and, perhaps without thinking?

And, then, my repeated visits to Gorki. . . .

Whenever I assured her that I was interested in the hospitals and the schools she wished to believe me, but I do not think she could.

And now I know that she understood everything. I must have been blind not to have noticed it then. I shall never forget that night, when lying in the arms of a woman who gave me her life, I was whispering the name of another, the road to whom she facilitated for me, consciously and voluntarily.

And I also reasoned then—I remember it. I argued with myself that the physicians must have been lying, that it was natural to live with one's wife, and that whatever is natural must not lead to death and that all precautions against childbirth were immoral—and Natasha's words about babies came to my mind. I also thought that perhaps I was killing my wife—but I dismissed that thought—because it was the only true one and I was afraid to admit it. . . .

And for nine months I had been attempting to deceive myself until the catastrophe came,

and no lie could save me any longer. If she were conscious that she was doomed to die—who knows what she had gone through during that time?—I never heard her reproach me, I never saw a tear which would have shown me she realized her situation. All I saw was that she redoubled her tenderness to myself and to the children, that she never got angry with anybody during that time, and I understood that she was a saint. It is not worth while to recall the lucid intervals when I pitied her—there were too few of them to expiate all that she had given me. I remember how, during her illness, I availed myself of the minutes when she sank in a heavy, oblivious sleep, in order to gaze at her and kiss her hands, because I dared not speak to her of my love when she was conscious. I knew she would not believe me. How often did I feel like approaching her and telling her all—the whole truth.

Was it better? I do not know. At last that very disease came which had doomed her to death. I was not in the house at the time and they ran to the garden to call me. Running up the staircase I met the doctor. He wore a troubled expression and told me that there was very little hope; that my wife was in grave danger.

I went to her room. Her head high on the pillows, she was breathing heavily and petting Tanichka's light hair. I bent down and kissed her on the forehead. It was still wet with perspiration.

She gazed thoughtfully into my eyes, smiled with a smile which was new to me and drew me toward herself.

Did she see my tears at that moment?

What does it matter now?

The tears of an executioner who became afraid of his victim. . . .

And I ran out of the room on tip-toe.

And then the death struggle came. At times she would lose consciousness. Then she would regain her senses, open her eyes and seek me. So it went on until she fell asleep forever. . . .

To this day I see before me those deep, forgiving eyes, and to this day I fear to speak her name, for I love only her and have never loved anybody but her. . . . And I could not have loved. . . .

It is all clear to me now. . . .

ONE SCOUNDREL LESS

ONE SCOUNDREL LESS

It was in the middle of June. An intolerable heat ravaged the country. The crops, not as yet in their full bloom, were fast perishing, scorched by the rays of the burning sun. A second hunger year was in prospect.

I say "hunger-year," for thus it was called by the peasants who starved, by that part of the land-holders who came into close contact with the peasants and by a part of the press—which opened funds for the "starving" peasants in their various editorial offices. The rest of Russia either ignored the hunger altogether, or looked on it as a more or less serious deficiency of crops. For the amelioration of these conditions, various means were adopted, all depending on the man who at the time happened to be at the head of the country government. Portions of the corn-reserves were distributed, help was given out of the funds of the Red Cross, or loans were made out of the reserve-capital by the Zemstvo or the government.

The succor was given not in accordance with

the locality where the need of the population was greatest, but depended on the "Ukase" of the various authorities—the governors, leaders of the nobility, captains of the Zemstvo, aldermen and the like. It frequently happened that in the same county (coyezde) the peasants of one section were recognized as in dire need and were accorded the necessary loan, while the peasants of an adjoining town, though coping with the same difficulties, were denied all help, and only after great efforts were allowed to take corn from the barns which they themselves had filled.

Those who maintained that there was no famine were right, for nobody actually died of starvation. They continued to live, no matter how wretchedly. If at some places the typhoid fever epidemic assumed unusual proportions, it was argued that it had always existed. If children were underfed and grew up crippled for life by rickets, it was again pointed out that this had always been the case. If the peasants had nothing to feed their stock with and sold their cows or killed their horses by the hundreds merely for the hide, it was pointed out to them that they should thank God for having something to sell! Others even went as far as to naïvely advise the people to eat meat instead

of bread as it was cheaper and more nutritious. In a word, although almost all admitted that the conditions of the people were worse than ever before, some held that the people were hardened and tough enough through habit to meet any situation, while others claimed that the hardships had reached the limit of the impossible and maintained that help was indispensable.

The county of Ch—— was divided into two different parties, one calling itself the "Conservative Party," the other the "Liberal Party." Unfortunately where such divisions exist, a social program is for the most part engaged in on a personal basis and so becomes a political issue for the contending parties.

This soon became evident in the matter of recognizing or not recognizing the hunger in the county. As soon as some representatives of the Liberal Party deemed it necessary to give succor to the worn-out people and opened a subscription of private contributions for the starving peasants, the Conservatives at once arose in opposition, and with an unusual passion commenced arguing that help was not only unnecessary, but might produce an altogether injurious effect by keeping the people from useful work.

It is possible, nay certain, that had there been

no division of parties, the majority would have recognized some form of help as indispensable and the people would at least have been fed. But now, since the Liberals recognized the existence of hunger, the Conservatives refused to recognize it at all, and a fight arose, in which the contestants were the social workers while the hungry peasants were its innocent victims.

Owing to the fact that one party exaggerated in one direction and the other party felt bound to exaggerate in the opposite direction, the reports of the Zemstvo captains, of whom two were Liberals and three Conservatives, presented such a maze that one could not help seeing absolute famine in some centers and unparalleled prosperity in others. In accordance with these reports a loan was granted out of the Zemstvo capital to only ten districts of the county, while the slightest help was completely denied the remaining districts in spite of their continued protestations and entreaties.

The peasants could not help but see injustice in all this, and along with the growing want there grew a hidden hate towards their complacent and cruel landlords.

Peter Kiruchin had spent the night at the night-watchers. When he approached the vil-

lage on horseback, the sun had not yet risen, but from the chimneys of the huddled houses, pillars of smoke lazily ascended and one could see that the simple dwellers of the village were already awake.

During the night Peter had fed his horse particularly well, for he was planning to that day call on the Zemstvo captain who lived about twenty versts away. He was not looking forward to the journey with any pleasure, and so for some days had kept on postponing it. A month ago he had believed in the possibility of obtaining official help, and he had visited every governmental office, from that of the alderman to that of the nobility leader, but these authorities were all conservatives and, though Peter had never heard this word, he none the less felt the force of it! He no longer had any faith in appeals for government aid, and during the last month had sold everything he possessed to get money for his small family needs.

Now he again found himself destitute, with no bread for himself nor his family. There were still two linen sheets left that could be pawned, but Matrena, his wife, clung fast to them, and in order to get her to part with them, he had to resort to the very last means, a second visit to the Zemstvo captain. She had

insisted on it. Matrena could not understand why the peasants of the neighboring district received a loan; why the shoemaker at Lvashkin, who was a drunkard, received three pouds of flour, every month, while Peter, who was a sober, hard-working fellow, had to starve. Peter had grown stolidly accustomed to this injustice, but Matrena complained about it continually.

Every day Peter had to listen to these grumblings, and had to bear up as best he could while she gave him a thousand reasons why she ought to be helped. Endlessly she kept repeating the things which, according to her opinion, Peter ought to tell the Zemstvo captain. Peter had finally yielded to silence her, and to-day he was again going to repeat the disagreeable task of seeking government help.

On reaching home, Peter went, as soon as he had attended to his horse, into the house. On the bench sat a fair-faced, golden-haired boy of about eight years, who was fretfully rocking a cradle.

"Where is mamma?" asked Peter.

"She is out milking the cow."

"Vaska, go open the gates and chase out the cattle." It was Matrena speaking, and she

soon came through the doorway, carrying a pail of warm milk.

Vaska fetched his cap, and with the speed of an arrow, ran into the yard, glad of his freedom. Matrena, covering the pail with a cloth, placed it on the bench, and went over to the cradle.

"What are you waiting for?" she said, turning to Peter. "We'll soon finish the last crust, and that will be the end. We have already eaten up the sheep. What have we left now? Go to the captain, I tell you. What's the use of waiting any longer?"

"Confound you with your captain! You have not seen him, but I have. It is no easy thing to talk to him. He came out, and began to holler at us: 'Ah, you lazy things! When there is work to do you can't be found, but you are here all right to take the money for loafing.' I would like to ask him: 'Who is working anyway?' Not he, I'm sure. And how can any one work now? The other day I went out to plow the field, but it was impossible to touch the soil. I'm sure he isn't any better off with his own plows. Besides, they want me to dig no less than nine furrows on each sazhen (three yards). Get me the sheets, I tell you. I will

go to him, but if I don't succeed I'll go to the city. For the two sheets I can surely get three pouds (120 pounds) of flour. You don't want me to sell the cow, do you?"

"The linens," grumbled Matrena, taking a pot full of boiled potatoes off the stove. "We have eaten up everything; we are worse off than beggars. Why do others get monthly payments? Look at the Lidorskis, or at the Khommtooskis. Every month they go with their bags to the mill. And what is the matter with us? Do we belong to a different Czar?"

Paying no attention to the grumblings of his wife, Peter sat down to the table, took a potato out of the pot and began peeling it with his enormous hook-like fingers.

A herd of cattle stumbled by the window, raising clouds of dust. Vaska came running in, stopped against the table, crossed himself and, trying in all his movements to imitate his father, sat down to the table for breakfast. In the cradle the baby got uneasy, and was about to begin crying, but a nipple filled with chewed bread bought his silence.

The light in the house grew brighter. It was the beginning of another long, hot June day. Peter knew that the Zemstvo captain was not in the habit of getting up early and was therefore

in no hurry. Placing Vaska on the horse, he sent the two to the river so that the animal might quench its thirst, while he himself was oiling the cart.

About nine o'clock Peter reached the estate of the Zemstvo captain and, along with other petitioners, waited for his coming out.

Nicolai Ivanovitch Gayevsky got up in an abominable mood. And to make matters worse, there followed one unpleasantness after the other. The coffee was served him with cream that was sour. When he asked the reason, he was told the separator was broken and had not worked for two days. There was nothing left but to chastise the dairymaid and to send the separator to Moscow for repairs. Besides, during the night the horses of some peasants had broken into his garden and destroyed the whole patch of cauliflower. Now two women were waiting to ask his forgiveness.

By the time Nicolai Ivanovitch went out to the petitioners he was in such an irritated state of mind that he had already decided to chase out the whole bunch, rejoicing at the bottom of his heart that this time he had real cause for being angry.

Petitioners visited him every day. At the be-

ginning he earnestly regretted their lot, attentively listened to their complaints, promised aid and sometimes even gave it. But after he had joined the Conservative Party, quite imperceptibly to himself, he changed his opinions, and began to think that after all the need of the people was not as great as he had imagined. And when his manager, Mironov, started complaining to him that one peasant did not take out the manure, that another one did not finish plowing, while a third one took the deposit and never returned, Gayevsky more and more justified his indifferent attitude towards the people and grasped every occasion that helped to kill compassion in him or to provoke his resentment toward the petitioners.

This was also the case this morning. The dairymaid had spoiled the separator, the horses had trampled down the cauliflower, yesterday trees had been felled in the forest, the day before yesterday something else had happened—and all on account of these scoundrels, who embittered his life and who ought to be chased out.

Which he promptly did! All those who came to ask for help he rejected, making it plain that no help was to be expected. The women who came to ask regarding the horses he sent to the manager, while the rest who came concerning

matters judicial he sent to the clerk. Peter did not get a single word with him, and, muttering to himself, turned homeward.

But Gayevsky felt no inward echo of Peter's curses. Besides the fact that he had nothing to tell these people who came to him for relief, he simply had no time. Towards evening he had to be at a birthday party given by Zarubin, the leader of the nobility, who lived twenty versts away, and till then he had lots of work to do. He had to be at the stable, in the garden and especially in the field, where he was to experiment for the first time with a new plow A. Z. D., which was imported from abroad and which was recommended to him by one of his neighbors. He wanted by all means to see how the plow worked that he might boast of it before the gathering at the party.

About five o'clock he ordered the horses hitched and started. It was still hot and the driver rode slowly, lashing the horses to greater speed only when they passed a village. While passing the last of these villages not far from the estate of the leader, a new unpleasantness occurred. Some boy running across the street fell down and the wheel of the carriage ran right over him. Nicolai Ivanovitch wanted to stop to see what had happened and shouted to the

driver to halt, but the driver did not heed him. Looking back, Gayevsky was only in time to see some woman run out of a house and carry a golden-haired boy away.

Gayevsky could not make out whether the boy had been run down or whether he merely fell, but when he approached his destination he felt somewhat uneasy.

A large crowd from all parts of the country gathered on that day at the leader's. All the members of the Conservative Party deemed it their duty to visit their spokesman. The number of guests usually indicated the vote at the ensuing provincial and electoral sessions.

The traditional birthday cake graced the table all day dong. Around it there stood bottles containing the choicest of wines. There were also two small decanters of ancient cut glass, jocularly named Yasha and Petjka. In spite of the indissoluble chumminess of these twins, who were always together, they were dreadfully jealous of each other. When one was drunk out of, the other felt mortally offended. When the first was sent to the buffet for reënforcements, the second would delight in the popularity he had gained. The first, returning full of new vigor, and seeing his rival being so entertained, had to in turn become the aggrieved, until his

rival's strength waned. So they had alternatives of joy and anguish. On such days as this the rivalry of the twins intensified and almost reached a climax!

Nicolai Ivanovitch greeted the host and the guests, lit a cigarette and joined at the luncheon table a group of persons who were engaged in a heated discussion. A young man with honest and open face, whom Gayevsky had not seen before, held the center of the group.

"But, gentlemen, it is not fair to take and give nothing. We exact of them labor and work, we demand of them honesty, we present to them the highest ethical claims, and what do we give them in return? You say, they are well fed; however, I as a physician can tell you that half of the diseases of the peasantry result from bad food and poverty. I am entrusted with an infirmary; they expect good work of me, but is it possible to accomplish anything under the conditions of destitution and barbarity? Truly, I am getting discouraged."

"Gentlemen, won't you please have something?" interrupted the host. "Mr. Gayevsky, how about it? Yasha, you know, is very anxious; won't you have some cake, with cabbage and mushrooms? I followed your conversation closely. You're young yet, doctor, young!

What you demand is all very well, but try it once; schools, hospitals. . . . This is not Moscow, you must understand. Just try to increase the provincial tax by five copeks and you'll hear a new song. We ourselves shall soon have nothing to eat; so why talk of the peasants? Our fathers got along without these fads and fancies; they fed on swans, drank mead and choice wine, and everything was well. Now they all come with innovations. Gentlemen, please, something cooling! See how Petjka is getting fretful; he must not be offended."

After doing justice to the refreshments, the guests sauntered out into the park, where the young folks played tennis, then into the garden and the stables. Zarubin was considered a model master and he liked to boast of his household management.

During the season of horse breeding he would delight in telling the pedigree of each steed, in showing the distinguishing marks of every breed. Each horse was first walked with measured step to the platform and then after the admiring observers had sufficiently feasted their eyes on it, it was made to run while the doctor and many others who knew nothing of horses and their breeds wondered at the alacrity and speed of the grooms.

At the approach of evening all returned home and played whist a little till supper was served. Gayevsky found himself sitting next to the doctor. His other neighbor at the table was the local police captain, a buffoon and notorious cynic. He was a frequenter at Zarubin's house and the twins, Yosha and Petjka, enjoyed his especial favor. He knew how to keep on good terms with both of them and they served him faithfully.

All of this evening Nicolai Ivanovitch was somber and concentrated. The case of the boy constantly recurred to his mind and he was sorry he had not stopped his horse and ascertained what had happened to him. He tried several times to drive these thoughts from his mind, seeking to still his remorse by the thought that perhaps nothing had happened, that if it had, he was not to blame, but his conscience would not be lulled. Several times in the course of the evening, he wanted to talk about it to some one, but no opportunity presented itself. Either he thought that the person he was about to address would not take the proper attitude to the occurrence, and would assume that he feared the consequences, or it seemed to him that such a conversation would be out of place.

At last, however, he decided that the physi-

cian would prove responsive and determined to open his heart to him and even to ask him to pay a visit to the village and advise him of what had actually happened to the boy.

A sense of false shame did not permit him to go straight into the matter. He approached the subject from afar, asking the doctor how long it was since he had been assigned to the hospital, what university he had graduated from, and then, as if unintentionally:

"You know, I had a perfectly ridiculous experience to-day; I nearly ran over a lad in the village. The driver did not check the horses while a boy, as the devil would have it, was crossing the street. I think he was even caught in the wheel."

"Did that happen with you, too, Nicolai Ivanovitch?" asked the police captain. "Well, the rascals. How many times have I punished them for it, but still whenever anybody drives by they are always in the road. I will find out to-morrow whose boy it was and I will give him his due; you may count on that."

"No, Vassili Petrovitch, please, don't do that. I told the doctor of it because I fear I may have injured him, not because I want him chastised."

"Eh, why get disquieted? A blow with an ax

would leave him unharmed, and if you really did hurt him he deserved it well. There will be one scoundrel less in the world, that's all. You'd better empty your wine-glass; he who does not finish his goblet must have it filled again," jested the police captain, panting and replenishing the glasses on his right and left.

"I will go home shortly and will stop on the way to look in," whispered the doctor. "Tell me, where did it happen?"

"On the hillock, near the first or second hut."

"Very well, I think I can find it. But tell me, is it possible that everybody here takes the same attitude to human beings as our neighbor? This is awful; life cannot be treated thus. I came into the country full of hope, the highest aspirations. It seemed to me that the country offered the best opportunity for work, and now I find one disappointment after another. You cannot imagine how heartbreaking it all is! And this famine, too! Recently a patient came to me from the Vassilieff Volost and told of the plight of the people there. What horror, what indescribable misery!"

The Vassilieff Volost formed part of Gayevsky's estate. The doctor did not know it. Under different circumstances Nicolai Ivanovitch

would surely have taken issue with the doctor, but now he held his tongue and turned the conversation into other channels.

After supper the visitors began to disperse. Gayevsky was one of the last to leave.

In crossing the village, Gayevsky noticed the doctor's horse standing near the home of Kiruchin and bade the coachman stop. He no sooner opened the door and entered the hut than he felt that something terrible had taken place. He wanted to run away. He saw tragedy in the figure of the woman holding a babe in her arms, as she talked to the doctor; he saw it in the countenance of the doctor himself and he felt instinctively that there, on the boards which served as a bed, the victim of his speed was dying. He feared to look. He wanted to shut his ears to the short moans, as sharp and as measured as the strokes of a pendulum. He tried to turn his eyes away—but could not. At this moment nothing and nobody existed for him but two creatures: himself, big, but helpless and weak, and this little curly head with inflamed eyes.

The eyes of the lad looked straight before him and seemed to discern something new and serious which he had not seen before. Suddenly a

shudder ran through him and he uttered a loud, piercing scream.

Nicolai Ivanovitch shook with terror.

"He is unconscious," said the doctor, coming up to him and taking his arm. "Let us go; we are not needed here."

When the door closed after them the doctor halted and said:

"His condition is hopeless; he will hardly survive until morning. I could not examine all of his injuries, because each movement caused him unendurable suffering. Apparently his chest is caved in and several of his ribs broken. I can do nothing. Those screams are the beginning of the final agony."

"Can't anything be done?"

"Hardly, but if you wish, I will call to-morrow morning. But come now, let us go. You have to pass by my infirmary, and if you do not mind, I will ride with you."

The doctor saw the state of dejection Gayevsky was in and he pitied him. He sought on the way to console him, and argued that he was as good as guiltless in this case and cited instances of a similar nature. Gayevsky listened and kept silent. A great complex idea, as yet undefined, but persistent and tormenting, was working in his mind.

For the first time in his life he experienced complete helplessness. He was ready to retrace his steps, to speak to that hapless mother and beg her forgiveness, but he felt he could not do it, that it would not be sincere, that he would not assuage her sorrow, that he might even enrage her. To understand one another, human relations are prerequisite and that was exactly what he lacked.

The doctor told him, casually, that Peter Kiruchin, father of the injured boy, had gone that morning to him for help, and Gayevsky remembered how that very morning he had driven all petitioners from his house. He vividly pictured to himself Peter's return to his home and the hatred that would fill Peter's soul. This feeling of the anger which he aroused in others had come to his mind often before, but he never had permitted himself to pay any attention to it. His part in life was to punish and to reward and he stood in no need of anybody's indulgence. Now, however, when he craved the pardon of these very people whom he considered immeasurably lower than himself, he felt he was not worthy of it. Deep in his heart he knew that if the boy should die, nothing could repay for his life. But he would not undeceive himself and he kept on thinking of how best he

could make amends to the parents. At one moment he would decide to give the father money, then he thought three acres of land would be a fairer recompense, and then again any offer appeared to be inadequate; it was not the real thing. He came to no decision.

At the hospital the physician left him, and Nicolai Ivanovitch Gayevsky went home alone. When he approached his house the day had already dawned.

Gayevsky undressed and laid down in his bedroom. He wanted to fall asleep, to escape from his torturing mind, to forget. "Morning is wiser than evening," he concluded, closing his eyes; "to-morrow I will do something." What that "something" would be he did not know, but he felt that something must be done and contented himself with the belief that it would be something good.

"One scoundrel less"; the words of the police captain suddenly stabbed him like a knife. He remembered this officer's pampered, liquor-flushed face and alongside of it he saw the facial expression of the woman bending over her dying son, her features lit by the smoking lamp.

He stood near her, saw her affliction and was unable to utter a single word of consolation.

He hastened to escape, to avoid seeing her suffering and the pains of the curly-haired "scoundrel" he had himself mortally injured.

"What horror! The fault is not so much in the fact that I ran over the lad; that is a misfortune, as in our whole attitude towards him and his kind. That is our crime. When the police captain said 'one scoundrel less' nobody even retorted; I saw how our neighbors smiled at his charming witticism. If I did not share his feeling towards these people, I should not have gone away and left that woman alone. I cannot help the boy, but the mother I can, I must help. This is my chief and only duty and I dare not shirk it as a coward or a criminal would."

Nicolai Ivanovitch arose from his bed, called in his servant and ordered him to get the horses ready.

He quickly dressed and without waiting for the horses to come, went into the stable and left directly from there for the village. He did not know what he was going for, and he did not care. He felt that he must go, that he was doing right, and this thought quieted him and gave him new strength.

The morning was cloudy, and Nicolai Ivanovitch felt chilly after a sleepless night.

His carriage rolled noiselessly along the dusty roadway. Gayevsky tried to imagine how he would enter the hut, what he would say to the woman and what she would retort, but it did not work. In spite of all his efforts he did not even succeed in framing an opening sentence to relieve the embarrassment of his entrance. At moments he would succumb to dread and false shame and was ready to turn back. But he knew the thoughts which would weigh upon his mind at home, and drove on.

The nearer he came to the village the more frightened he grew at what awaited him. Peasants who passed him took off their hats and bowed low. He fancied they surmised the object of his trip and he turned his head aside to avoid their looks.

At Kiruchin's dwelling Gayevsky alighted from his carriage and, without glancing behind him, hastily stepped into the hovel.

The first thing that he saw was the pallid, waxen face of the dead Vaska lying with his head toward the Holy Image. Near the oven stood Matrena, talking with two other women. At the sight of the stranger she hastily covered her face with her apron and started to cry. Between her groaning and sobbing it was impossible to make out what she said. Only single

words were heard: "Darling . . . left me. . . ." But most of the sounds were quite impossible to distinguish; as likely as not she herself did not know what she was uttering.

Gayevsky stood and felt hot tears roll down his cheeks. Almost unconsciously he walked up to Matrena and in a quaking voice, which sounded strange and unfamiliar to him, blurted out, "Forgive me in the name of God; I am guilty."

Matrena quieted down for a moment, looked into his face frightened and then broke into an irresistible gush of tears and cries.

Nicolai Ivanovitch stood over her, as she cried. He felt his own tears trickling down his face into his mustache and beard. He wept like a child and like a child was happy in his tears and would not stop their flow. He no longer paid heed to what people thought of him. He felt himself emerging from a shell which had held him tightly encased. Something clear and infinitely happy was filling his soul. He no longer feared to share the sorrow of this woman, for he felt it with all his inner self. And while she sobbed and told him how her son had suffered before he died, he looked at her with inflamed eyes and together with her lived through the awful night. At times when the

tears blinded his eyes, he wiped them away, while the woman quieted and consoled him. From Matrena, Gayevsky learned all about the life of that family and listening to her narration he felt himself growing closer and closer to her life. He wondered more and more how he ever could have harbored feelings other than compassion and love for these people.

Months rolled by.

The second famine year was more terrible than the first. As heretofore, the parties were engrossed in their campaigns, and in those places where the famine was not officially recognized the distress of the people reached extreme limits.

Gayevsky sat in his study and looked over the lists of names of the peasants throughout his five volosts. There was a rap on the door, and the doctor came in.

"Nicolai Ivanovitch, I bring you good tidings. Your petition on behalf of the peasants has been granted and you will get ten carloads of flour. The police captain told me that he will raise heaven and hell against you for spoiling the whole district and that he is going to denounce you to the Government."

"Don't mind him," rejoined Gayevsky, smil-

ing at the doctor with a good nature he had not possessed in former days, "I cannot be angry with him. He served me a good turn once and I will ever remain grateful to him. Do you remember the words that he said when I killed that unlucky boy last summer, that there would be 'one scoundrel less in the world'? I never will be able to forget those words, for they made me realize what I had been until then. I am beginning now to believe that the world has indeed lost one scoundrel. But at what an awful price!"

WITHOUT A NOSE

WITHOUT A NOSE

It is a brilliantly illuminated salon. Petrograd's elite is assembled; the ladies are in sumptuous evening dress that would make even Paris envious; the men in their swallow tails show that they, too, have fashions to watch, and that they have kept apace with them.

I know that she will soon make her appearance here, and I am waiting with an anxiety that is delightfully painful. I cannot imagine, try as I will, how we will meet here in the presence of every one, after what transpired between us such a short time ago. It takes all the effort I can command not to betray my confusion.

She enters with a light and even step, gorgeously beautiful; pure and irreproachable in her simplicity. I see ladies, under a mask of amiability, trying to conceal their jealousy. I see gentlemen respectfully kissing the gracefully chisled hand, the beauty of which even her long white gloves cannot conceal.

She comes to me. She extends her hand with

the same indifferent smile, not a muscle of her face betrays the slightest disturbance or embarrassment. How charming she is.

I gaze at her and contrast this to what happened half an hour ago. Half an hour ago, I entered her boudoir. She was but half-dressed; her long black tresses were streaming over her bare shoulders. She was standing in front of her mirror; and as I opened the door, she saw my reflection. She threw up her head, and thrust her beautiful bare arms backwards, gracefully luring me into her embrace.

"Quick, quick. I have been waiting for you."

I rushed into her arms and we were lost in the ecstasy of an eternal kiss.—Then I caressed her, I kissed her, . . . kissed her all over, and long, so long; we could not tear ourselves from each other. For a moment we would separate to gaze at each other's intoxicated eyes, and then again and over again, our lips sealed the tempest of our passions. . . .

And now she entered this reception room, majestic and pure, and this very hand, which has just been so passionately caressed by me, this hand is kissed as if it were one of a sacred deity.

"Oh, if you only knew, you foolish dressed up apes, who are worshiping her purity. . . ."

Suddenly, I know not why, this hand brought to my memory the history of a noseless beggar-woman, who had lately died in our village.

What a wild comparison. . . .

She was the daughter of a former serf, Ivan Suvoroff, who had served as a valet to my father, in his younger years. When yet a little girl, she used to come to our Manor to help her father in the pantry, and at the age of twenty she had grown to be a charming, gentle girl. I was a mere child then, and I can remember how I used to run around with her on the meadow in front of our house, playing "hot and cold." Even the whirlwind rustle of her skirts comes back to me; I can remember the delight with which I was possessed, when, making a quick turn, she ran towards me and grasped me with both hands under my arm-pits and lifted me high up into her arms.

I patted her ruddy cheeks, I tossed her head hither and thither admiring her eyes, her even white teeth; I closely pressed myself to her elastic, panting breast.

I remember even the fragrancy of her breath, a wholesome, pure breath.

Then she disappeared somewhere, and I have never seen her since. I had almost forgotten

her; when one day after a lapse of some years, I entered our new church, and my gaze fell upon the Ikon of the Holy Virgin. I was amazed by its striking likeness to some one I could not remember. I stood before the pure image tenderly leaning over the Holy Infant, and wondered where had I seen that face, that expression of the features?

Suddenly it came to me, . . . "Katya." Was it really she, or was it merely my imagination? Was it possible that it was a mere coincidence? Or, perhaps was it that youthful half forgotten impressions are so pure, that they see in people only their abstract beauty? I wondered.

I am forty years old now. Lately, taking a walk behind the barn, I met two old women, returning from the cemetery, their heads covered with white kerchiefs, and with them a peasant carrying a spade on his shoulder.

"Whom have you buried?" I asked.

"Katherine, the noseless."

"What Katherine?"

"The beggar-woman, the daughter of the former Serf, Ivan. Well, Master, you hardly knew her, she was here so little. She lived mostly in Moscow."

Katya? Is it possible? My beautiful childish reminiscences, my dream. Pure, fragrant Katya,—the noseless beggar-woman.

I followed the women, and bit by bit I gathered from them the following story:

When our church was being built, a strange image painter came to the village, to paint the altar screen for the church.

He became acquainted with Katya, and soon fell in love with her. So close did the attachment become that when he returned to Moscow, he took her with him. For several years, until he died, she lived with him, acting as his model. At his death, she had to earn her own livelihood, and knowing no other trade, she continued to follow her vocation of a model. But her beauty faded all too soon; she went astray; the ground shook under her feet and she slid down the incline. It was the old, old story of the easy road of thorns.

As long as her youth lasted she lived comfortably with never a thought of the morrow. Sometimes she had plenty of money, but she was not mercenary. She never saved anything, she gave all away. She was good and large hearted. Who knows, she might have gone astray just because of this goodness of her heart. She knew not how to refuse.

When finally the evil disease seized her, she had no means to seek treatment, and she had to beg in the streets. The police soon found her, placed her in a public hospital from which she was discharged with the yellow ticket and a nose eaten away by the ravages of disease.

Thus fallen, half decayed, and hungry she bethought herself of her native village, and wearily she dragged herself back there to wind up her life's journey.

It was a Sunday, when she straggled into the church to offer her prayers. She had bought a penny candle and brought it to the Image of the Holy Virgin. Holding the candle in her left hand, she lifted her right hand to her forehead to make the cross; she raised her eyes and stared at the image.

The choir sang, "The Song of the Cherubim."

The old woman stood petrified, her hand not finishing the cross; she did not believe her eyes.

To whom was she offering her prayer?

For whom had she bought the candle, upon which she had spent her last penny?

From under the Silver Sacerdotal Vestment there gazed upon her, her own eyes, her own pure girlish face.

Some features were so similar, so intimately familiar were the corners of the mouth, the

WEARILY SHE DRAGGED HERSELF BACK TO WIND UP HER LIFE'S JOURNEY.

Without a Nose)

wavy locks on the temples protruding from under the veil, and even the hand, that she could not stand her fright and she fell in a hysterical fit upon the stony steps in front of the altar.

They lifted her up and carried her away.

"Klikusha,"[1] was all they said. There are such in every parish.

Katherine lived but six months after, and every Sunday, every holiday, up to her death, she used to come to church and stand in the right hand corner near the choir in front of the Ikon of the Holy Virgin.

She stood with a sinking heart and malevolently followed the people kissing her hand; she looked at them as they brought their infants after communion and made them kiss that hand.

"My hands, these very dirty, soiled hands,—you do not know whose hands you are kissing. Kiss, kiss—the hands of Noseless Katherine.

"These hands were painted by my lover, Volodya, and with these hands I had caressed him,—caressed him all over, and I kissed him with this mouth, and he loved to kiss me upon these dimples of my cheeks and my eyes.

"And then . . . whom have those hands not caressed. . . . Kiss, kiss."

[1] *Klikusha* is a Russian term for women suffering from religious hysteria.

The life of Katherine was now bent upon accomplishing a few tasks before she died.

All week long, this withered, soulless woman walked from house to house with a bag on her belt, and waited for the day, when there was service at the church. Then she felt revived.

All the money she gathered during the week—sometimes considerable—she spent on candles, which she placed before the Ikon of the Holy Virgin. She started to embroider a towel for her.

Just started, but did not finish it, for she died.

"Frozen on the highway."

She was placed in a coffin of thin planks and was brought to church for funeral service.

She lay with her face towards the Ikon of the Holy Virgin, and instead of her eyes, the gaping hole of the fallen nose looked upward from the coffin.

Some one approached and covered her with a shroud.

Next Sunday, on the ninth day after Katya's death I went to church, and placed a 10 copek candle before the Ikon of the Holy Virgin and kissed her pure, slender hand.

This was before my departure for Petrograd.

CHOLERA

CHOLERA

Chapter I

Andrei Afanasievitch Razumov was returning from the district town, where at a special meeting of the Rural Council the question of combating the approaching epidemic of cholera was discussed.

He was a provincial, small landowner, and this was the first time in his life that he took part in a matter of public importance.

Two weeks previously, on receipt of the printed invitation from the President of the Council himself, he ordered his mistress, Masha, to wash and starch his white shirt, yellowed lying in the closet, whilst he himself looked over and cleaned his creased double-breasted coat, made about a decade ago in the Government town.

On the eve of leaving he called the head laborer and coachman, Danilo, and instructed him to oil the harness thoroughly, wash the carriage, and to himself give a half-measure of

oats to the two driving horses—a couple of home-bred, round stallions.

It was Danilo also who trimmed Andrei Afanasievitch's wide spade-shaped beard and his curly gray locks that framed so comically his round absolutely bare head.

In town, at the meeting, Andrei Afanasievitch felt exalted. He was met quite like a persona grata and was unanimously elected district sanitary supervisor. After the meeting he was invited to dinner at the Club.

Before zakuska,[1] when Andrei Afanasievitch was offered a tumbler of vodka, he at first attempted to decline, out of modesty, but the president of the nobility was so gently and kindly insistent that he could not withstand and it ended by his taking some, and even not quite moderately. . . . And now, having traveled on about 20 versts, he found that all the way, sitting in his wicker buggy, he was sleeping soundly and must have been wakened at some jolt.

Looking round, he found that he was near home.

The heat was subsiding.

Danilo, loosening the reins, was sitting motionless on his seat; his bowed back, clad in a

[1] *Hors d'œuvre.*

black sleeveless coat, and his shaven neck were covered with a thick layer of dark, gray dust.

The horses, partly blackened by the dust, were running at that quietly brisk trot, which in their experience just kept away the whip, and regularly, almost in turn, they waved their thick, plebeian tails.

On both sides of the road the full grown rye was yellowing.

"About 9 ricks," reflected Andrei Afanasievitch aloud, reaching in his pocket for a cigarette and lighting it.

"Were it not for the marsh, we could have made it more than 12," remarked Danilo without emotion, lifting himself on the seat and adjusting with the end of his whip a displaced strap of the harness on the side horse. "They'll be commencing near town."

"The ground is better there, with the sand; here it will ripen in about two days, not earlier."

"Depends on the weather."

"Danilo, are there many oats left in the wing?" Andrei Afanasievitch asked suddenly.

"You saw yourself, Andrei Afanasievitch; there are four quarters there."

"Then this is what you do: you take this over to-morrow to the barn. The wing I will turn

into a barrack. The feldsher[1] will live there. The dispensary and ambulance will be in our house, understand?"

"And where will you put the pigs? And all the harness, ropes, and all the other goods?"

"Where, where? Anywhere you like. Can't you find place for all this in the closet upstairs? You can space off a corner in the barn, or in the house, in the closet."

"Maria Gavrilovna won't let you put it in the closet, and there is no room in the barn. The corn will ripen, and where will you put the seeds? You want to be left without seeds? . . . What will you do without seeds? . . . What need had you to start with all this cholera, what need . . . indeed?"

"There, right away you talk like an uneducated fool," Andrei Afanasievitch began, sententiously; "you don't understand. Do you know what cholera is? Cleverer people than you and I have thought of this thing. You should have heard what was said at to-day's meeting; where it comes from and how to fight it. You see, a tiny little speck of cholera gets into the water or mud. . . ."

"I know. In the village a whole wall is plastered with these pictures. The masters have

[1] Assistant doctor.

nothing to do, so they think out all kinds of specks. We never had this cholera and wouldn't have it. But it does not take long to call her in . . . not long at all. Where the doctors are, there is cholera. Look at Spassky, the village coachman was telling of only the other day. There is a doctor there, two assistants, and the people die off. When we get the doctors, she will come to us, too . . . sure, she'll come."

"That's why we can do nothing with you, because you are ignorant churls. You are being helped, doctored, and you still harp on your own. You don't deserve to be cared for," concluded Andrei Afanasievitch finally.

Passing through the village of Nikolskoie, the horses turned sharply to the right, past the church, ran round the thicket of lilac and stopped near a small, double-log homestead with ornamented porch.

Andrei Afanasievitch with serious mien alighted from the carriage and went up the steps. Stepping on the porch, he took off his wide-rimmed soft hat, and somehow became shorter in stature and more comical in appearance. Smoothing down his disheveled hair, he entered the dining room.

From the adjacent room, the bedroom, there

came out to meet him Maria Gavrilovna, a soft, round-faced blonde.

This Masha,[1] daughter of the dairymaid, was enticed by Andrei Afanasievitch about a year previously, and had been living in his house ever since. Like all women of the lower classes, when transplanted into better conditions with plenty of good food, she very quickly settled, grew lazy and became fat.

Andrei Afanasievitch, by nature kindly and weak-willed, making pretense at power, yet utterly incapable of ruling, although he appeared to treat Masha strictly, and before onlookers even liked to order her about, was in reality quite under her influence and even feared her.

The fact that she was soon to bear a child, a matter to which she herself was quite indifferent, was a source of the greatest embarrassment to him. Many times he had begun to think of how he should act when the child was born, but the problem seemed too difficult; he therefore postponed it from day to day, and thus it still remained unsolved.

To marry Masha seemed to him inconvenient, primarily from self-esteem. How can he, Razumov, marry his servant girl? Whilst she was still his paramour, his chattel, in the position of

[1] Short for Maria.

a servant, who prepared tea for his guests and dared not even take a place at the corner of the table, he derived some pleasure in noting the envious glances his neighbors cast on her, and even took a certain pride in her. He experienced then the same feeling that the owner of a fine thoroughbred horse has when leading it out. For such occasions he ordered Masha to put on a fine dress and took inner pride in the fact that he pretended not to notice her.

After that it seemed impossible for Andrei Afanasievitch to marry Masha, whilst to keep her in the house with a child seemed still more inconvenient.

Only one way was left, the simplest way out —to put the child into a foundling institution.

This thought, however, was repulsive to his whole being and never seriously entered his mind. He loved children so tenderly, womanly, and was so happy at the thought that to him, a man no longer young, would be born a son (most assuredly a son), that to give this son away into strangers' hands seemed absolutely impossible.

Thus it went on, without any decision, and "for the time being" he only engaged the cook Arina to be in the kitchen, so that Masha should not have to work as hard as formerly.

. . . . . .

After taking his tea, Andrei Afanasievitch made the round of his farm, took a peep into the threshing barn, where the men were making preparations, and went to bed early.

Chapter II

The next day, after sending out the men for the second plowing, Danilo went on to clean the wing.

Harnessing the water-carrier "Golovasty" to the cart, he, first of all, removed to the barn the oats and the harness; he then screened off a corner near the stable for the pigs, put some straw in it and started pulling them in.

All this he did without hurry, murmuring something under his breath in an assured and business-like manner. Catching the pigs by their hind legs, he dragged them two at a time across the whole yard to the new pen.

They grunted and squealed, but he paid not the slightest attention, but carefully deposited them on the fresh straw and returned for some more.

"Now, stay there and good luck to you, you dirty pigs," was his parting remark, as he went on to do something else, "to-morrow you shall have a roof, too."

By midday the wing was all ready and two

maids, hired for the day, their skirts tucked up high, were already scrubbing the greasy wooden floor, on which the dirt and mud of many years had formed a thick layer.

The feldsher appointed by the Council arrived in the evening.

Andrei Afanasievitch, who was anxious to play the rôle of benefactor, had given instructions to invite the feldsher to him and had already ordered Masha to set the table, but it appeared that the guest was so drunk that he could not even get out of the cart. He was picked up and put to bed to sleep it off till the morning.

The old man who brought the feldsher was also tipsy. Unharnessing his horse and giving it some food, he went into the servants' room.

It was supper time. The laborers were just coming in. Washing their hands from the spout of the kettle hanging over the basin, they seated themselves by the table.

The old man was invited to join them.

Questions arose on all sides,—who he was, where he came from, and whom he had brought.

"From the village 'Dolgoie,'" explained the old man, "and this is the assistant doctor, Sidor Ivanovitch, named Gnidin. He was on the cholera there. A good man, and no end of brains;

but for him, God bless him, I would not have escaped death; he rubbed me off. He likes his glass a bit too much, but what of that? There is the other feldsher, from the army, a good one at that, but not so good as this one, although he does not drink."

"And how can you keep away from the bottle in this blackness? You can't; it's cholera."

"What is she like, uncle, this cholera?" suddenly asked Seriezhka, a jolly, happy-go-lucky youngster, the best dancer in the village and the first to run all kinds of errands.

"Wait until you get it, you rascal, and you'll see what it is," angrily replied one of the laborers. "He, too, needs must know what she is like. Eat and keep your tongue; 'tis none of your business."

"How is it not mine? And what if in truth she comes here, what then?"

"Then you will know. Now don't poke your nose where you are not wanted."

Just then Danilo entered. With an unfavorable side glance at the speakers and with an ear to what they were saying, he quietly took his seat and ate his food.

There was a little hush in the conversation. In turn the men reached out to the steaming bowl, carefully holding the heaped up spoonfuls

over a piece of bread, so as not to lose any precious drops of soup, and ate with relish and with noise.

Danilo was held in esteem and no light or unnecessary talk was made in his presence by those beneath him.

"Well, you brought some . . . artist,—" he remarked, just glancing at the old man sideways, "an artist indeed."

"And what's the matter with him? Is he bad? We would not mind taking him back."

"Who said bad? Too good, perhaps. With such a one, good friend, even cholera has no terrors; cholera herself would drown there, yes. . . ."

"And what do you think?" replied the old man with spirit. "Yes, sure, she will drown. You see him drunk now, but once he starts, there is no other like him. Wait till she comes to you, then you'll talk."

"The Lord save us. What's to be done? This is the will of God."

"None of God's. Too many people there are, that's why the cholera came."

"Now, you tell me this. Why is it that where the doctors are, there the cholera comes? Here, take our village, may the blessing continue, we had none of it. And now I don't

know. They have brought this drunken devil and I fear she may come."

"How is it cured, uncle?" again jumped in Seriezhka.

"How? Quite simple. Drink wine and you'll be well. Without wine, of course, you can do nothing. The body weakens, the spirit fails. And there is the end. She is afraid of wine."

"I see that she is afraid," remarked Danilo gloomliy. "Brought a drunkard and himself no better. Get to bed, all of you, and you, Nicolai, go to the wing; see lest that devil does not set us all on fire," commanded Danilo, licking up his spoon and wiping the handle with the edge of his shirt.

"It's time to go to bed. Is everything ready for the field? To-morrow after dinner we may begin."

After supper the laborers still lingered a few minutes, exchanged a few pleasantries about the cholera and retired.

The old man returned to his cart and there went to sleep.

Chapter III

Danilo's gloomy forebodings came true even sooner than he himself anticipated. The very next day after the arrival of the feldsher a peasant died of cholera in the neighboring village, Lopashino, and in Nikolskoie a woman took ill.

It was not yet known in the village that the feldsher had arrived, therefore the messenger ran to Maria Gavrilovna for some drops. He was directed to the wing, but took no heed and, saying nothing, went on his way.

Some time later Sidor Ivanovitch heard of the case and, without further loss of time, jumped on the first horse he could see and at great speed arrived at the house even before the man returned.

The woman was lying on a wooden bench moaning. The convulsions had subsided and her body was getting cold. A very old woman and two young children were hovering round her. A little girl with a black pitcher in her hand was giving her to drink, and a boy with

only a shirt on, and no knickers, was standing listlessly watching the proceedings.

Looking around, Sidor Ivanovitch immediately ordered two women to start rubbing the patient. At the same time he found, goodness knows where, some bottles, which he filled with hot water and put at her feet and on her stomach. When the women grew exhausted, he would snatch out of their hands the rough cloth and rub the sick woman with such force that the skin grew fiery red and the poor woman screamed with pain.

"It's nothing, dearie, nothing; just bear up a bit and you'll be saved," were his encouraging words as he applied greater and greater force.

Towards the evening the woman was better and the danger was passed. Sidor Ivanovitch gave her some drops and ordered the children not to leave the house till the next day; he also left instructions to collect the woman's soiled clothes, and turned homewards.

Passing a saloon, he bought a bottle of vodka and emptied it almost at one gulp.

His horse had moved on and he returned home drunk, humming an indiscernible tune.

Andrei Afanasievitch, who had not yet retired, was drinking tea on the porch.

"Well, how goes it?" he asked, catching sight in the darkness of the returning feldsher.

"She'll live; must have some lime to-morrow . . . for dis . . . disinfecting," stammered Sidor Ivanovitch, smiling vaguely, "and must . . . b . . . burn the cl . . . clothes . . . but m . . . mustn't . . . poverty . . .—"

Seeing that the feldsher was again drunk, Andrei Afanasievitch did not detain him but let him pass on to the wing.

Going in to sleep, he made a mental note that when sending next to town he would certainly write to the Council and ask that Gnidin be removed and another one sent in his stead.

Early next morning he went over to the wing. Sidor Ivanovitch was already up and dressed, and was mixing some medicines.

"Am preparing the disinfectants," he explained, as Andrei Afanasievitch approached; "must go over immediately to my yesterday's patient and disinfect the house and clothes as much as I can. Where can we get some lime? We have here other things, but lime is the best, after all. I am going over there right away, and from there must run over to Lopashino. A man died there yesterday; they did not tell me about it. Distinfecting has to be done there, too."

Watching Gnidin's serious face and listening to his business-like speech, Andrei Afanasievitch recollected the spectacle he presented the previous night and the night of his arrival, and it was difficult to reconcile the two; was it one and the same man?

The feldsher's words were so full of confidence and in them he felt such deep consciousness of duty that he was aware of a feeling of respect towards him. He recollected his last night's thoughts and for the moment he was ashamed before this man.

That night Gnidin was brought from Lopashine very late, again dead drunk.

It appeared afterwards that he had disinfected several houses, treated a patient and himself washed and cleaned the clothes of the one that had died.

Chapter IV

The weather continued hot and dry.

The rye was ripening quickly and beginning to drop, and from morning till night every one was in the field in order to gather it in time.

The women came out to work with their nursing infants, which they placed by the rick or under the cart. The elder children kept a watch on the youngsters and were also kept busy running for cold dinner, water and kvass.[1]

The dry weather increased stomach ailments and cases of cholera occurred more and more frequently. Sidor Ivanovitch was busy all day long running about the villages, never resting, often going without dinner, and still not able to accomplish half of what was necessary. There were occasions when he worked throughout the night and then he returned home sober, but most evenings he took stiff doses and went to bed drunk.

His frequent cures and his bold and at the

[1] Home-brewed cider.

same time kindly manner inspired the people with trust towards him; he was treated everywhere with confidence and generally liked.

With Andrei Afanasievitch's consent, he engaged a woman to help him and trained her for these duties. She often went out in his stead or was left to look after the dispensary.

This nurse, a homeless soldier's widow, Avdotia, so quickly adapted herself to her new duties that the peasants trusted her no less than the feldsher himself and often came to her with diseases that had nothing whatever to do with cholera.

Andrei Afanasievitch also effected cures, but in his own way.

He believed only in foreign imported medicines and in pepper-wine.

Although he feigned great bravery, at bottom he was dreadfully afraid of the cholera and continually picked up his courage with unaccustomed drinking. It came to such a pass that he drank surreptitiously, hiding from Masha.

If anybody on the farm had any stomach pain, Andrei Afanasievitch immediately sent over a tumbler of pepper-wine, and only after that recommended the feldsher. Encouraged by this, nearly all of his men took ill almost daily;

at first singly and then in groups they crowded near the house asking for "medicine."

On one occasion Andrei Afanasievitch attempted to refuse. After dinner that day Danilo appeared and stated that the laborers were protesting and refused to go on with the work.

"They are afraid of the cholera," he added.

Andrei Afanasievitch had to give in.

From that time on the men received their glass twice a day, before dinner and before supper, whilst in the evening they often took a little extra "on their own."

After a long day's work returning to the servants' room they had songs, music on the concertina, and Seriezhka danced, singing up-to-date ribald peasant couplets.

The worst for Andrei Afanasievitch was when some one came to him asking for "something, your honor, for the coffin."

This put him out terrifically. Still more so when it was women in white kerchiefs that came to beg. He had such fear of death that just to rid himself of any caller who might mention any one dead, he would immediately order Danilo to give four large boards, whilst he himself hastened to the sideboard to pick up his spirits in a glass.

Lately these demands for wood grew more

frequent and insistent. All the boards on the estate were used up. The demand came for logs. There were plenty of these. No permission was asked from the master. Danilo simply distributed them.

And finally they came for them even without asking Danilo. Sometimes also not for coffins.

Every day corpses were brought into the church. The burials were quick, without any bell ringing, without the carrying out ceremony and without walking behind the hearse. Shallow two-yard graves and transparent coffins were all that many a person got. There is no time to dig a deep grave and put together a tight coffin, when the corn in the field is uncut and ungarnered.

"The dead won't mind; they are comfortable as it is."

The harvesting on Andrei Afanasievitch's field was also progressing slowly. One whole field was still standing uncut and there were no women to bind the sheaves. After a consultation with Danilo, Andrei Afanasievitch decided to appeal to the peasants to help him out "for vodka," the more so as the next day was Sunday when it is sinful to work for money.

In the evening Danilo harnessed the horse and went through the village, returning home

with the good news that the peasants had agreed.

Early next morning Andrei Afanasievitch started out in his racing buggy. Placing in the bottom a good measure of pepper-wine, and, "for any emergency," taking the foreign medicine, he went to the fields.

Work had already begun. Danilo had divided the reapers two to the acre and leading his horse, whip in hand, he walked around giving orders.

From amongst the high corn stood out the straight-haired heads and shoulders of the reapers; with every movement of the shoulder one could distinguish in the distance the clang of the sickle and the crisp sound as the hardened straw fell to the ground.

Andrei Afanasievitch rode through the field, amiably greeted the peasants and stopped off at some distance to have a smoke.

"About twenty-five have turned out," said Danilo, approaching; "some have backed out on account, they say, of the cholera and such things."

"Have you brought the wine?" Andrei Afanasievitch inquired.

"I have brought about five gallons; that'll be enough for them; besides there's also yours."

"Mine's medicinal," replied Andrei Afanasievitch, stroking his bottle, "but perhaps we may add some of it to give a better taste."

Just then Danilo noticed a peasant walking towards them along the furrow. He was advancing slowly, without a sickle.

"What do you want?" inquired Danilo, as the man approached.

"To your honor, Danilo Petrovitch, I was sent to say that Ivan Makarytchev over there is took bad."

"Where?"

"Over there, under the rick."

"What's the matter with him?" Andrei Afanasievitch was alarmed.

"He is tossing about as in a fit and has turned blue all over."

"Get up behind on the buggy, and we'll go over; you hold the bottle," commanded Andrei Afanasievitch, gathering the reins and whipping up the horse.

Danilo got on his horse and followed behind.

The sick peasant was lying face down on the ground on the shady side of the tall, freshly made stack, surrounded by the other peasants, and moaned. Hearing the approach of the newcomers, he raised himself on his knees and listened.

His face had a forlorn and miserable expression. The unwiped saliva was dripping down his beard and mustache. To his temples, wet with perspiration, stuck his thin yellow hair, from beneath which looked out a pair of colorless, tearful, bleached eyes.

As his eyes fell on Andrei Afanasievitch, his moans increased.

"Oh, good friends, I am dying . . . oh, death has come . . . oh, friends of mine. . . ."

Andrei Afanasievitch alighted from his buggy. With trembling hands he reached in his pockets for the foreign medicine, poured out a measure without count, about 50 drops, and filled up the cup with pepper-wine.

"Well, Ivan, what's the matter? Stop that howling; what are you, a woman? Here, take this; it will pass away. Here, drink."

"Oh, Andrei Afanasievitch, I can't; my death has come."

"Here, you are told to drink; then drink, or you will indeed die."

"I can't, master," moaned Ivan, a little louder now.

"Now, drink. You, boys, hold his head and pass me the glass," commanded Andrei Afanasievitch.

"Wait, let me lift myself. I may do it my-

self," moaned Ivan, raising himself and wiping his mustache with his hand. "Well, to your health."

"To your health, to your health," replied Andrei Afanasievitch; "you will presently go on to reap, and just now you wanted to die."

Ivan swallowed his glassful slowly, in small gulps, and only after he had emptied it did he notice that the pepper-wine had burned his mouth and his whole inside. For a moment it caught his breath and there he sat with eyes bulging out. Then he sort of coughed, cleared his throat, took a bite of bread and started up.

"That's right," said Andrei Afanasievitch, quite pleased with himself, "but rest awhile; you'll soon run, not only walk."

A few minutes later he took up his bottle and rode back to the field.

When during rest-time the men had their round of vodka, Ivan Makarytchev took his glass with the others.

There were several other similar cures of cholera effected by Andrei Afanasievitch. His pepper-wine did not so much cure as give the patients courage. 'Tis true, in some cases his medicine did not cure, but he avowed that that was because it was not taken in time.

The next day after the case with Ivan, Andrei Afanasievitch stopped in a field where a peasant woman was taken ill. Again he gave her his wine, and later on the feldsher attended her; but she died towards the evening.

Her death became known at the farm when some messengers came to Danilo for boards to make a coffin.

Chapter V

Death is terrible only to those who still await something in life and who take pleasure in it. And thus the other way too: the harder the life, the more indifferent is the attitude towards it, and the easier and less painful to die. In time of cholera, when death is all around and when every one feels its proximity, these two attitudes towards it come into evidence with greater force.

On the Razumov estate the one who feared death most was Andrei Afanasievitch. Several times he had already imagined that he had all the symptoms of the epidemic and constantly took his own medicine. With this growing fear of the cholera upon him, the thought of the fate of his future son bothered him more and more often, and he made up his mind to arrange something in the event of his own death.

One evening he even went so far as to call on the priest with the idea of consulting him, but it so happened that the priest immediately

placed the bottle between them, the conversation veered in quite a different direction and Andrei Afanasievitch totally forgot the original purpose of his visit.

That day there had been three burials at the church and the priest was also excited and disturbed. Inured though he was to the sight of dead, the large number of them at once acted upon him terribly; at heart he, too, was afraid of death, not less than Andrei Afanasievitch.

Danilo also feared death, but with him it showed differently. He only hated the feldsher, and, wherever possible, made things unpleasant for him. He would take away his horse, or refuse to give him lime or tar, or curtail the supply to the nurse of bread or potatoes. All this he did gloomily, growling under his breath, avoiding any explanations even to the master.

When mentioning the feldsher in conversation with Andrei Afanasievitch, he never called him by his name; it was always "your feldsher," or "your drunken devil," "that one," and he always found some legitimate cause for his arbitrary actions.

"Seriezhka, go and harness 'Skinny' for that . . . devil," he would order in an angry voice, and, having purposely given the laziest horse,

he would look to it that there was no whip in the cart.

"Give him a good horse and he will drive her to death, or she will be led away from him, the drunkard . . . the drunkard. . . ."

As a rule, the feldsher only got a common cart, sometimes even just a dung-cart. And if Seriezhka would run to the barn to fetch some straw to make a seat, Danilo would stop him, saying, "No need to; he isn't made of sugar, won't break on the way."

Gnidin, though, did not notice Danilo's animosity towards him and treated him as ever, and as he treated everybody, kindly and trustingly.

In his quarters, in the wing, he had his own little sphere and life, which was shared only by one other person, the sanitary nurse, Avdotia.

She washed and cooked for him; she helped him in his work; she it was who put him to bed when drunk. No one, except the patients, ever entered their abode contaminated by the plague, and therefore nobody on the estate knew of their intimacy. And it was difficult to even imagine that such a thing could be; she was so old and ugly, this Avdotia, so fat, her face all pock marked.

Only the sick and dying loved her, for her

care, the softness of her movements, her kind and gentle voice, with which she consoled the suffering and alleviated their last moments. And when the sick one died, she would calmly and seriously go on to wash the corpse in the tub, dress it and place it with crossed hands on the bench under the ikon.

This she had been doing before the cholera. When a dead body was to be "attended" and women were called in, Avdotia was always the first. She received no money for it. Occasionally, at the funeral feast a piece of rye-cake would be reserved for her, or at times she would get a glass of vodka, of which she was fond and which she never refused.

Her relations with Sidor Ivanovitch happened unexpectedly, one night after a very hard and strenuous day.

During the day they had both been rubbing down a sick man, who in the end died in their hands. This was an armless old man, almost a pauper, who lived with his old woman at the end of the village in a dilapidated hut, without a yard and almost without a roof.

A few years previously, when one of his arms had sickened off, the community took away his only piece of land and undertook to feed him "in common." This way he was always

without bread and he and his wife took turns in begging for "crusts."

When he was caught by the cholera, he was alone in his hut and was a long time without help. When the big cramps came on he moaned with his poor might, and when the pain subsided he would go outside by the wall.

Feeling worse and worse, he took out the wax candle from the ikon and got the matches ready to light it before dying. He would have liked, too, to take his last sacrament, and was thinking of crawling to the neighbor's to ask him to go for the priest, but at first he was still hesitating whether this was really death or not, and afterwards he became so weak he could no longer raise himself.

In this condition he was found by his old wife, who immediately ran to the estate.

Sidor Ivanovitch arrived together with Avdotia, and when the old man died he left her there, himself going over to the next village where a whole family took ill.

Two more died there that day.

Gnidin returned home drunk and excited, with a bottle of vodka in his pocket. He ordered Avdotia to get ready a samovar and treated her with the wine. She drank with him and, putting him to bed, took pity on him.

Chapter VI

Notwithstanding the terrors and ravages of the cholera, every day bringing new cases of "cramps" and agonizing convulsions, with death lurking at every corner and new hillocks appearing in the churchyard, life on the Razumov estate flowed on as ever and from all appearances this terrible summer seemed hardly any different from other summers. Perhaps in the evening there was rather more singing in the servants' room, and wilder and louder were Seriezhka's entertainments.

Towards the end of July all the corn was harvested and all that was left in the fields was the bristly stubble. The work was now centered in the threshing barn. Mountains of sweetly smelling sheaves were already carefully pressed together, and in the next barn the seeds were being prepared.

In the distance were audible the jovial outbursts and whistling of the driver, and all day long the thresher whined monotonously.

Danilo, in an improvised apron made out of an old sack, was standing by the cylinder and fed in, while Andrei Afanasievitch, in white cap and blue glasses (his eyes pained him) rushed about the threshing barn giving orders.

He was very anxious to clear his crop by the new method, which he had seen on the neighboring estate, belonging to a German, named Hubert, but in no way could he accomplish it. Either the rope would be too short, or the horse would lose his footing, or the loop would not be tied properly and the sheaf would again roll down—whilst all the time the sheaves kept coming in from the carts. Much time was lost by all these interruptions and only after dinner did the work get into full swing and the baskets underneath begin to fill.

Towards the evening Arina, the cook, suddenly ran in, frightened and out of breath, and informed Andrei Afanasievitch that the sanitary nurse was "dying."

"The feldsher has been away since the morning," she panted. "I went up to her to ask for some drops for my cough, and there she was on the floor lying on some straw, all blue, with terrible eyes. I ran to her and shouted 'Aunt Avdotia,' 'Aunt Avdotia!' but no sound; she seemed not to hear. Her eyes were just look-

ing straight in front of her. Perhaps she's dead? Let's go quick, master."

Andrei Afanasievitch's eyes blinked nervously. With unsteady hands he buttoned his rough short-coat and with hasty steps he went over to the wing.

In front of him was the cook, who kept on repeating her tale.

Approaching the steps leading into the house, Andrei Afanasievitch slowed down and then stopped in indecision.

"Come on, master," urged Arina, looking back, "she is just here in the large room. She may be still alive; who knows?"

"Go and see," replied Razumov, lighting a cigarette.

"I am afraid to go alone. Why don't you go?"

"Go when you are told, you fool; what, is she going to bite you?"

"Then you just stand in the door, sir," begged Arina, as she slowly went over to where Avdotia lay.

Coming up close to her, she looked into the fixed eyes of the dead woman, shook her cold arm and tiptoed back to the door.

"She's dead, sir; peace be with her," she whispered and piously crossed herself.

Andrei Afanasievitch also made a sign of the cross.

"How was it no one heard how she died?" he asked, as they retreated their steps. "Perhaps some help could have been given her. I think I saw her this morning going for water."

"Indeed, sir, she was seen much later. At dinner, she was over to Maria Gavrilovna and complained of pains inside."

"Why did no one tell me of it?"

"Impossible, sir. You were all day by the threshing and everybody was busy. Who could bother about her? We thought it was nothing, and now . . . oh, Lord!"

"Well, there is nothing to be done now. Go and see that she is removed," concluded Andrei Afanasievitch, glancing at his watch, "and lock the door with the chain so that the dog does not get in," he added, suddenly turning into his house with quick steps.

Sidor Ivanovitch returned home late from his round. It was dark. Leaving the horse by the stable, he tottered on unsteady legs towards the wing. Getting into his small room, he commenced to undress.

"Any tea, Avdotia?" he asked loudly, addressing the other side of the room.

No reply.

"Must be asleep," he reflected and stepped into the large room.

On the floor, where Avdotia usually slept, was now lying a human body, covered with something white, and at the head, with an unsteady light, flickered a thin wax candle stuck on a low stool.

Sidor Ivanovitch came nearer.

"Is it a corpse?" he wondered, as he uncovered the sheet.

The thought that Avdotia could be dead was so far from his mind that he looked long before he recognized her. And even then he did not seem to understand what had happened. His clouded brain could in no way comprehend that the Avdotia, with whom he had spent the night just passed and who this very morning, strong and healthy, had brought him the horse to the porch—was now lying before him . . . dead!

He bent close over her head, looked into the slits of her half-closed eyes, turned her stiff head and in a drunken voice was telling her something in a whisper.

Then he burst into tears and embracing Avdotia threw himself on the straw by her side.

Falling, he upset the wax candle, which fell down and began to glow.

Gnidin came to himself when the fire had crept up to his head and a bright fire was in the room. Jumping to his feet, he began to run around the room, looking for water, and, finding none, went back to the room, attempted to drag away the corpse, stumbled twice, then ran out on the porch and commenced to shout.

Luckily the men had not turned in yet. His shouts were heard; the people came running and the fire was finally put out.

Avdotia, half burned, with charred face and burned hair, was dressed in a new shroud and placed on the bench.

Sidor Ivanovitch was sent to sleep in the servants' room.

Chapter VII

That night Andrei Afanasievitch's sleep was disturbed.

The nurse's death and the fire had left such a strong impression upon him, that throughout the night he had horrible dreams, and waking several times in a cold sweat he would light the candle and rouse Masha. Growling lazily, she would open her sleepy eyes for a second, blink in the light unconsciously, and turning over on the other side would immediately resume her snoring. But even this gave him some courage.

It was necessary for him to feel that here near him was a live, warm being, that could be roused and made to speak, and for the moment he would forget his fears, would move nearer towards her and fall off to sleep.

Once, out of such a doze, he awoke with a horrible dream upon him. He saw himself in the last clutches of cholera with the feldsher working in vain to keep him from dying. The bodily agony was almost unbearable, yet his suffering

was chiefly in his mind. He wanted to live to look after his son, his son that would be his heir, and here he was dying and no provision had been made for him, nor his natural mother at his side.

Struggling in bed, Andrei Afanasievitch gradually realized it was all a dream; that he was still alive and that he yet would have time to arrange matters for his son. Already that son was a very real person to him and in his heart there burned the fire of a great and tender love for him.

And falling asleep again, he dreamt, not of cholera, nor of death, but of how he would educate his son, and send him to a great university.

Andrei Afanasievitch awoke late the next morning. Masha was already dressed and drinking tea.

Summoning Danilo, he inquired if everything was ready for the nurse's funeral; he also told him to go over to the priest and ask him to have everything ready. Andrei Afanasievitch had decided to bury Avdotia at his own expense and wanted to make the funeral grand and impressive.

Danilo returned with the news that the priest was not home, but had gone to Pashutino, and

that four more coffins were outside the church, waiting for his return.

"We, too, shall have to wait. He may return to dinner," added Danilo calmly, "and in the meantime I'll put the boys to fan the rye; no use their standing about all day."

Twelve and one o'clock had passed, but no sign of the priest, and no word from him either.

At the door of the closed church, under the scorching sun, on the bare ground stood the coffins, hardly covered by cloths, under which were discernible the stiff contours of the head, the arms crossed on the chest, and the unnaturally upright feet covered by woolen socks and old rags.

On the steps leading into the church and leaning on the fence were several women and about half a dozen peasants. The women had cried their fill and at intervals only emitted deep sighs and sobs. The men were discussing the harvest.

The loudest amongst the speakers was Ivan Sidorkov, who brought for burial his only son, his supporter. After digging the grave he was tired and had taken a glass of vodka, for courage.

"What good is there in the master's land?" he was saying in an excited voice. "You pay

him ten roubles for it and reap one of his acres, but nothing grows in it but weeds and garlic, that's all. If he gave us some land nearer . . . but, not likely, that land he won't give. . . . Too clever."

"See what he wants," said some one.

"And why not? Look at his crop; eighteen ricks standing on each acre, six measures already brought from the mills, whilst I only have five tiny ricks harvested and only three small measures to be ground. A quarter for seeding, and what have you left? You slave only for the cattle. At least there is a little straw and chaff. And now there won't be even that; we have reaped to the bottom." Pointing towards the coffins, he added, "Time for me to go there, too."

There was a lull in the conversation for a time. They were all quiet, each one thinking of his own sorrow; the women renewed their stifled sobbing. Seeing Andrei Afanasievitch approaching on his racing buggy, the peasants rose and bowed.

"Well, hasn't he arrived yet?" inquired Razumov, reining in his horse.

"Not yet, Andrei Afanasievitch, and we don't know what to do. We can't stay here overnight with the dead. We have sent a messenger

on a horse for him; he said he'd be back in no time, but he isn't back yet."

"What is the Father doing there?"

"He went to visit the priest at Pashutino. He went over last night."

Andrei Afanasievitch sharply turned his horse around, pulled at the reins, and with a parting shout to the peasants to wait for him, headed for Pashutino.

He drove his horse with all his might and within half an hour arrived at his destination.

Chapter VIII

The priest of Pashutino, Father Ivan Generozov, was an old friend of Andrei Afanasievitch's. In former years, when there was no cholera, Generozov was fond of arranging fishing parties on the river, in which all the clergy around and the Razumov estate participated.

The priests, their long coats tucked up, rowed the boats and gave instructions to the men, who pulled the net, keeping it straight, and with long poles frightened the fish out of the bushes near the banks.

Whenever the net became entangled or would catch on any undergrowth, Uvar, the church reader from Pashutino, would dive into the river. He could remain under water an amazingly long time, and his patience seemed inexhaustible. By the time the net was dragged up, Uvar would generally be quite blue and shivering in his whole body.

After the fishing, the workmen were treated to vodka on the bank and the sportsmen would

return to Father Generozov's summer tent. There, waiting until the mother cleaned the fish and prepared the "ukha,"[1] the guests would partake of "what the Lord sent," and it was seldom that the company parted before daybreak.

Arriving at the clergyman's house, Andrei Afanasievitch tied his horse to the porch and, without entering the house, walked right into the garden.

He was seen from the distance and greeted joyously.

"Come in, come in. It was good of you to come," said Father Ivan, as he came forward and stretched his hand out cordially.

Andrei Afanasievitch bowed down for a blessing, then shook hands all round, and immediately turned to Father Nicolai with the request to come back with him at once to Nikolskoie.

He knew that there would be invitations to stay and join the party, but he had made up his mind on the way not even to sit down and he wanted to remain firm.

"Wait a bit, old fellow; what's the hurry? Runs in once in a blue moon, and here he is off again. Sit down; take a drink, at least," the

[1] Fish stew.

host was saying; "don't offend an old friend. There is no hurry; we'll manage to bury them all in good time. This is no fire."

"There was a fire, too, on my farm," put in Andrei Afanasievitch, "and the wing was nearly burned down."

"Well, did you put it out?" asked Father Nicolai, anxiously.

"It was put out; just a corpse was charred."

"Thanks to Heaven. And how did it happen? Do tell us. Just take a sip of this tumbler and a bite; you can then go back. Mother, hand some cake to Andrei Afanasievitch. That's right. Good health!"

Andrei Afanasievitch had eaten nothing since morning and the sight of the tasty pie tempted him. He approached the table "just for a second" and emptied the rather large glass of vodka. Some one filled it up again. Recounting to them recent occurrences, he did not notice how he drank a second and then another and still another glass, and only some time later happening to look at the clock he found to his dismay that it was 4 o'clock.

He began to hurry. Father Ivan tried to hold him back, saying that Father Nicolai was not well and that the coffin could be placed in the church overnight; but Andrei Afanasievitch

recollected the crowd that was waiting by the church and insisted that Father Nicolai should accompany him immediately.

"And if Father Nicolai is unwell," he added, "I will have to trouble you, father, to come with me,"

"Well, if you must go, I suppose there is nothing to be done," agreed the host, as he filled their glasses for the parting.

He saw them off to the buggy. They got in, the priest in front and Andrei Afanasievitch behind him, and started.

Leaving the priest at the church, Andrei Afanasievitch hurried on to the estate to make arrangements for the removal of the dead nurse. The men, however, had gathered near the wing and announced that they could not carry the corpse.

"We are afraid, Andrei Afanasievitch. Let the villagers carry it."

"What are you afraid of, you fools?" Razumov flared up, "is she going to eat you, what?"

"No, not that, but we are afraid of the cholera without the medicine."

"What medicine?" Andrei Afanasievitch did not yet grasp their meaning.

"What medicine? Why, to be sure, your medicine, sir, the peppery. There'd be more courage then."

"Is that what you want, you wretched knaves? You'll get it, but be quick. Seriezhka, run in there and tell Maria Gavrilovna to bring it out," he ordered, and he started towards the house followed by the men.

Filling the first glass, he was, according to custom, made to drink it himself, the master's cup, and then the men in turn came up for their share.

Andrei Afanasievitch arrived at church half drunk, unsteady on his legs and with a noise in his ears.

The requiem was held for all the dead bodies at once, and they were all carried to the cemetery together. The priest walked in front with the cross, followed closely by the bearers with the nurse's body, behind which walked Andrei Afanasievitch. The other coffins followed, and behind them hurried the women with spades. Several boys closed the procession.

In lowering Avdotia's coffin, one of the ropes under it got entangled. No pulling or drawing could move it.

"Leave it, throw the earth over as it is," ordered Andrei Afanasievitch. "There's no

use worrying over a piece of rope that only cost a few copeks."

"How can you, Andrei Afanasievitch, waste such good material. We need the rope," remarked one of his men, Vassili. "Eh, there, Seriezhka, get down, I'll hold you."

Andrei Afanasievitch had no time to reply for Sereizhka, catching hold of the rope, had swiftly slipped down and was already with his feet on the coffin.

Disentangling the rope, he lifted his head and shouted up, "Andrei Afanasievitch, if the cholera gets me, will you bury me?"

"We'll bury you sure."

"With wine, too?"

"Yes, with wine."

"If death comes, will die," cried Seriezhka, defiantly, and tapped the coffin with his foot.

"All right, come out," said Vassili, pressing his feet into the muddy clay and drawing up the rope.

Seriezhka, jumping off the sharp edges of the sides, flew up like a bird.

"Fill up," he ordered, pulling out the rope and smiling.

While the grave was being filled, Andrei Afanasievitch was standing aside and seemed to be thinking very hard about something.

"Well, let us go, Andrei Afanasievitch," at last said Father Nicolai, coming up to him, "we have nothing more to do here."

"Just a minute, Father, let's wait till the mound is evened. Now, boys, livelier, throw some soft earth here, on the side, just here, that's right."

"Well, is it all ready? Now let's go back. Gather up the spades, and don't leave the rope behind."

"Come, Father."

Coming up to the church, Andrei Afanasievitch seemed to have remembered something and he suddenly inquired:

"When does fast begin?"

"It begins next Saturday. Why are you asking?" Father Nicolai was surprised.

"And what day is to-day?"

"Wednesday."

"Tell me, Father, is it permissible to be married to-day?"

"To-day! Yes, to-day, it's permitted, but why do you ask it, Andrei Afanasievitch, I don't understand you?"

"Well, then, Father," Andrei Afanasievitch spoke solemnly, "I would ask you not to lock the church. I wish to be married immediately. Seriezhka, run quickly home and tell Maria

Gavrilovna to come here right away, but tell her to hurry; say it's most important. Let her come as she is, and not stop to change her clothes."

"Wait a bit, Andrei Afanasievitch, you can't do it like this, at once, without witnesses, without bans. Wait a fortnight and if you are still of the same mind, you can have your wedding by Assumption Day."

"I can't wait, Father; I have decided, let it be so. We'll find witnesses. Which of you boys can sign his name?" he addressed his men. "And no bans are necessary. Don't you know me? And as to Masha, you christened her."

"Yes, that's so, but still it would be better to put it off a bit; nothing will change until then."

"What if I get the cholera and before we can be married? Where will the child be? No, Father, it can't be postponed. You must marry us at once," insisted Andrei Afanasievitch, seeing that the priest was already wavering and inclining to give in.

"I'll go and see if there are any candles," said Father Nicolai, going into the church. "Shall I call the choir?" he inquired. "We'll at least call some neighbors," he decided, as he ascended the steps, crossing himself.

Andrei Afanasievitch found a little comb in his pocket, straightened his hair and beard and took his place at the right side of the altar. Informed by Seriezhka of the purpose for which she was summoned Masha soon arrived at the church, and in spite of Andrei Afanasievitch's instructions, she had found time to put on her gray best dress and scarf, and on her head she wore a kerchief.

The witnesses for the bride and bridegroom, who signed the register, were:

Danilo Agnev, peasant.
Feldsher Sidor Gnidin, non-commissioned officer of the reserve.

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